

SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY

ICONS: TEXTS AND CONTEXTS.  
EXISTENTIAL AND HISTORICAL READINGS OF SOME  
REPRESENTATIVE MEDIEVAL ORTHODOX GREEK,  
RUSSIAN AND UKRAINIAN ICONS

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AN ALBUM OF ICONS: ATTACHMENT

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

As reflected in the main theme of my thesis – *Icons: Texts and Contexts. Existential Reading of some Representative Medieval Orthodox Greek, Russian, Ukrainian Icons* –, the main object of my analysis is icons, both their textual and cultural context, including the theological. My aim is to involve several different resources – both literature and selected icons – for understanding the phenomenological nature of icons in a communication process. This will enable me to realize the principal aim of the work, which is to present icons as an active part in the cultural development of the Orthodox Church and as an expression of Orthodox theology. I will base my work on the historical background of icons which has been reflected by many interpreters and writers in modernity.

*My personal interest* for the interpretation of icons in their theological, historical and cultural context dates back to the time when I lectured in Kiev-Mogila University in Kiev (Ukraine) on “Iconography and Iconology” (2001-2007). This course combined theoretical knowledge and practical experiences. As part of the practical studies, I used my own experiences to work directly with the collections of icons in Ukraine: Kiev, Chernigov, Lviv, Symu, Dragobuch, Cherkasu, Zitomir, Kamenets-Podilskij, Hmel'nitskij, Rogatun, Kozelets. I know them in real colours, sizes and in their environment. In Ukraine I also had the opportunity to work together with the restorers and this was a valuable experience in studies of the technical specification of the icons.

In Russia I studied the three biggest collections of old Russian icons in St-Petersburg – State Russian Museum and in Moscow – State Tret'akov Gallery and in the Moscow's Kreml. During a long period I visited old Russian cities Novgorod, Pskov, Vladimir, Suzdal. All these “meetings with the history” were set in the frame of compulsory connected to visits to churches, monasteries and museums.

The collections of Byzantine icons I studied in St-Petersburg – State Hermitage, in Moscow – State Pushkin Museum of Fine Art, in Kiev – Museum of West and East Art, in Paris – Louvre,

in Roma – Vatican, in Egypt – the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine. It inspired me greatly to have this unique opportunity of studying the historical and cultural context of the icons, including their theology.

*I also have a scientific interest* in studying the icons in their historical and cultural context. Firstly, the study of the icons as texts can be done as an “existential reading”. Secondly the study of their context opens up for contact with the historical development of iconography and various theological disputes. Here we may speak of the icons’ “historical meaning”, which is based on the understanding of the time and place in which icons have appeared. As I regard both these approaches, both the existential and the historical readings, to be of scientific interest I shall concern myself with both meanings and address them side by side.

These two meanings or readings are based on three related, yet distinct perspectives of icons as texts, and they draw information from all three of them. We may identify these perspectives as 1) reading the pre-text, which is a direct form; 2) reading the text from the icon-image, which is an indirect form; 3) and reading through mediation, which is a form of dialog (or monolog) between person and icon. In order to further clarify the distinction between perspectives 1 and 2, we may explain it as follows: *The pre-text* represents the biblical or hagiographic narrative which lies behind an icon as its textual inspiration. Such pre-text can also include church tradition about the person(s) that is(/are) represented by the icon. The icon-image, as can be seen in the icon itself, is an indirect representation of the pre-text, that is the narrative or church tradition on which the painted icon relies. From all three perspectives the icons are read as *texts* – either directly, indirectly or mediated. But all three perspectives on the icons as texts also presuppose different *contexts*. These may be of a literary, historical or cultural – including theological – nature. Thus the icons, when read from each of the three perspectives represent *texts*, and these texts are embedded in distinct *contexts*.

*A person who reads the icon* may or may not be able to read it from either one, two or all three perspectives, depending on what previous knowledge he or she has.

*Equally the artists who have created the icons* have not merely contributed to the second perspective – the indirect reading. In their reading of the *pre-text* they have *interpreted* the narratives or church tradition – the direct perspective. In their painting (‘writing’) of the icons as texts they have made use of church tradition, theological interpretation as well as artistic

traditions or canons (indirect perspective). Finally the icons reflect the times in which the icon painters ('writers') were active – either the cumulative or the distinct traditions in which the icons are set – and therefore their own dialogue with the person(s) or narrative(s) represented in the icons.

This means that if one is to study the existential and historical meanings of icons scientifically, one must pay attention not only to the three mentioned perspectives and their historical and cultural contexts but also the role of the icon painters as textual mediators in all three perspectives.

*My aim in this thesis is therefore to analyze both the existential and historical meanings of icons as part of a communication process.*

In order to come to grips with the *existential meaning* I shall focus on the icons themselves and their message. With regard to identifying the *historical meaning*, that is, reading the icons in their context, I will use a combination of theological, aesthetic and scientific approaches.

My task will be delimited only by the discussion about the icons which are not merely pictures or paintings with graphic value, but which are truly icons according to Orthodox church tradition. I will therefore take into my discussion only Orthodox images, and among them only Greek, Russian and Ukrainian icons. The period I will limit myself to is from the origin of icons in the 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries until the peak of their development in the 10<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. In my analytical work I will make use of both theoretical and practical studies. The last one will apply to the single and comparative analysis of the images. As a auxiliary and visual element in this work I will use the album of icons: attachment.

In the theoretical studies I will follow the positions made by the philosopher and theologian Pavel Florenskij (2001). His point of view of icons reflects profound knowledge about the historical and theological approach in the world of icons. His work is therefore of great significance for this study. I will also draw on insights from Nikolay Pokrovskij (2000), who was connected to the first generation of Russian scientists who promoted the academic-analytical studies of icons in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. He made new interpretations about the cultural impact of icons on the formation and realization of the Orthodox culture in general.

Another source is the work of Michail Alpatov (1973), who was one of the famous art historical scientists in the study of the icons in the Soviet Union. His work was based on the aesthetic approach to icons. His book which is close to perfect in the formal iconographic analysis has, however, some terminological and ideological weaknesses. Vadim Klevaev (2007) represents the Ukrainian school of the art historic science. His explanations about the origin of the icons was based on the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. He presents icons in the context of the culturalogical situation.

As relevant research sources for the theoretical approach I will involve the works of several other scholars, namely O. Davies (2001; 2009) , Damianos (2004), H. Evans (2004), R. Jensen (2000), V. Lichachova (1981), E. Panofsky (1997), and C. Volz (1997). From time to time I shall also make references to the works of R. Bauckham (2000), J. Egne (2003), R. Grand (2004), J. Harries (2000), W. James (2001), L. Jones (2003), F. Nicks and J. Gouillard (2003), M. Wiles and M. Santer (1975), and T. Ware (2009).

With regard to the icons that I will make use of in my comparative analysis I have chosen also the mosaic in Ravenna and the pictures from the Gallery Uffizi in Florence. All icons or other monuments of art which I will mention or analyze in this essay, I had the chance to see myself in original and this gave me the sensation of contact with them. Studies of at the theoretical and practical levels have inspired me to reflect optimistically about the mutual correspondence between icons as texts and and their contexts.

My aim, therefore, is to test three aspects of my theme – *Icons: texts and contexts*. Each aspect will be presented in a separate chapter. The aspects are: 1) the phenomenological aspect of icons; 2) specification of the language; 3) creators, authors and writers of icons.

Chapter Two is therefore dedicated to the problem “Icons as cultural, spiritual, aesthetic and scientific phenomena”. For the realization of this task I plan to use several theoretical tools. For example, in 2.1, I will attempt to give a flexible definition of icons, which will facilitate a rather broad point of view on this object. My objective is to arrive at this definition through negotiating the meaning of icon. Then I will give a historical approach to the origin of icons in chapter 2.2. This will be useful for understanding the specific context in the development of the icons from their functionality and the artistic language which was used in this period. An important aspect of recognizing the historical meaning of icons will be arrived at through a theological approach,

which will be the focus of the discussion in the chapter 2.3. In the last part of this chapter 2.4 I shall discuss iconography as one of several possible approaches in the science of icons -- as a special branch of textualization of icons.

Chapter Three will deal with “The language of icons: methods of reading their messages”. In order to accomplish this task I will engage in explaining the special rules or codes which are part of the icons’ canon and symbolic expressions 3.1. Icons as mediators between two worlds have had a special attitude to the light and their derivatives, colours and forms, as I will show in chapter 3.2. Icons as a liturgical art have through all times had a close connection to the architectural space. Icons and architecture have a long history of unity in harmony and have also mutually influenced each other; this I will show in chapter 3.3.

Chapter Four opens the icons as the “window” which were made by the theologians and artists. This chapter will address the issue “The painters of icons: methods of work and ways of expression”. Here the focus is on the painters, who gave us this type of art. Just as the icons had their own special features so also their “workers” had different roles to play and had different places in society during the different periods. They came to be the personal reflectors of the icons’ history 4.1. In the end – as two relevant examples – I shall give a characteristic of two artists – Theophanes the Greek and Andrei Rublev, whose names the history coincidentally has preserved for us 4.2.

Finally – in the Chapter Five– I will demonstrate how my analysis has shed light on the existential and historical readings of icons, the three perspectives of interpreting them, and the mutual influence between icons as texts and their contexts. Thereby I wish to show how icons are texts communicating in contexts.

## Chapter Two

### ICONS AS CULTURAL, SPIRITUAL, AESTHETIC AND SCIENTIFIC PHENOMENA

In this chapter I will discuss: about the definition of icons; historical approach in the culture of icons; theological understanding of it; the iconography as a separate science and one of the keys for reading icons as a text.

#### **2.1 Icon: specification of definitions and transference of meanings**

*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

*Romans 8:29*

The culture of icons is, probably, one of the longest living religious and art traditions in Europe. Literally we can say that the first millennium AD. was used for the formation of the “holy images” and that in the next millennium icons exist in the tradition. Over the centuries their meaning became deeper and broader, and richer in impression.

It is an interesting task to observe the culture of icons, like a medieval testament which still keeps orthodox rules and has special keys for reading and understanding their texts. It is also a big challenge to show and explain the specific language of icons in the context of the historical development in the East European culture.

The question about different attitudes to Christian art in general, and icons as part thereof, has been the focus in theological debates several times (see 2.3). The consequence of these discussions reveal a cultural phenomenon, since in the Protestant church images have been of far less importance than in the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. In the Christian art of Northern Europe from the 15<sup>th</sup> century the main role is played by engravings and prints. These forms of art are much more connected to the dominated role of the word, not to the image



itself. Thereby can be seen the realization or the main transcription of the mentality in the period of the Reformation and the time thereafter.

In the Roman Catholic Church the meaning of the “holy image” developed in the direction of a “realistic image” and even in the portrait. Here the way went from abstraction symbols till the realistic or even naturalistic impression. For the realization of this was used the oil painting on canvas as well as sculpture. Both of them have the same main characteristic – the creation of the illusion in space. Three-dimensional images came close, as much as possible, to a realistic description of the materialistic visual version.

In the Orthodox Church the “holy image” still exists in the version of “icon”. Icons are typically tempera painting on wood. Icons are considered to be miraculous and were said to “appear”. (Russian: *yavlenie*, явление). Appearance in an icon is its supposed miraculous discovery. “A true icon is one that has 'appeared', a gift from above, one opening the way to the Prototype and able to perform miracles”(Klevaev 2007, 51 [my translation]). Hence the icon is understood both to reveal some of God’s glory and mystery, as well as being in God’s service. It has a theological message as well as a divine role to play.

When people are married in the Protestant Church they often get a Bible, as a present. In the Roman Catholic Church it is a Bible and an image, but in the Orthodox Church – only an icon. Although all married couples receive gifts in the form of texts – printed or painted –, the three examples show significantly the differences of mentality in the different branches of the Christian church. And in the Orthodox church the icon as a holy image is a mystical text, reflecting indirectly the glory of God as well as aspects of Christian faith.

In order to have a clear discussion it is fruitful to make a specific definition of “icon(s)”. The definition is, of course, itself a product of history or reflection of a given historical time. The most acceptable method in scientific research is to arrive at a position where definitions are not subject to dispute, but reflect consensus. And icons, like any other cultural phenomenon, undergo transformation of meanings during the history.

My suggestion is, therefore, to start with a definition of *culture*: “Culture is the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behavior. Culture thus defined, consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, and ceremonies” (“Culture”. In *New Encyclopedia Britannica* 1987, 3:784). If we narrow down the

first sentence it also comprises “Christian culture”; all three components – (patterns of) human knowledge, belief and behaviour are all used to define “Christian culture”, as well as they are part of Christian culture itself. The second sentence reveals that almost all the elements of which culture consist have some connection to the icon.

Turning then to ‘icons’, it is a matter of fact that icons exist in tradition and that it is possible to recognize them as the reflection of time in a historical context. In this sense it is possible to analyze the questions how “past” relates to “present” and also, how “present” collaborates with realities. Here we have a connection with the theory of “cultural dynamics”.

Cultural dynamic is a process of interpretation of the individual in a social interaction. Culture in the hermeneutic sense is understood as a frame of interpretation that is always challenged and always in the midst of a process of change; one that cannot be separated from the individual and the local context where the interpretations are created. Culture – “invisible threads in the back of our heads” – is dynamic and not static (Dahl 2004, 11).

Icons keep the idea about the historical memory like a version of lively tradition. The main function of this tradition, if we look upon this from the historical perception, is not a demonstration of a conservative or static mind, but the demonstration of the wish to preserve the idea of the prototype. It is the wish not to be lost in the dynamical time of the stable element – a basic message which came by the word and the image. Icons in Greek and several Slavic languages speak as if they have been “written”, because in these languages (like Greek, but unlike English) the same word (*pisat*, писать in Russian) means both ‘to paint’ and ‘to write’. This reflects also the unity of meaning between text by words and text by images in the old church history.

As a fact, the Orthodox icon tries to save the historical memory together with the collective mentality. This is an important element of the icon tradition, which has one of the oldest roots in church history. The oldest extant formulations of western and eastern creeds are provided by Rufinus and by Eusebius of Caesarea. The first line of these creeds are as follows:

West:	East:
I believe in God....	We believe in one God...(Grant 2004, 281).

Here we can find a distinction in essence, when the Western church applied to the individual, and the Eastern church – to the collective system of thinking and doing.

When understanding the icon as a cultural phenomenon it is practical to follow the idea that phenomena are the objects of the senses as contrasted by but also apprehended by the intellect. Of course, as thinking human beings we cannot exclude the intellect from participating in any of our functions. According to W. James: “Mystical truth resembles the knowledge given to us in sensations more than that given by conceptual thought” (James 2001, 15).

“Greek Φαινόμενον (“to seem”, “to appear”) – does not indicate whether the thing perceived is something else than what it appears to be” (Pokrovskij 2000, 17 [my translation]). Here we can understand how close the old meaning of icon and phenomenon was, which both are consistent with the function “appear”. Sensual contemplation and sensual comprehension of the phenomenon/a was the main forms of communication with the God-world in the medieval period, where the icons played the role as a bridge between human reality and human belief.

When icons are introduced they are often phenomenologically understood as an appearance which combines reality and unreality. “Two worlds – heaven in the heaven, as a voice of Creator and heaven visible on earth, as liturgy, have meeting points in the icon tradition” (Trubetskoy 1916, 116, [my translation]). For the correct understanding of reality, as a context of the world of the traditional icons, we need to use their own philosophical and theological context. “What is considered metaphor for us (‘heaven above’) was for our ancestors a matter of deliberate and literal belief” (Davies 2004, 25).

The characteristics of icon painting has principal differences with the modern art. It can be understood only through a teaching about icons which was formulated many centuries ago by the originators of the Orthodox Church dogmas. In fact, the icons are the presentation of Church dogmas in visual images. There is no reason to doubt that there therefore also existed a cult of icons as a sacred objects.

Icons are considered to be the Gospel in paint, and therefore careful attention is paid to ensure that the Gospel is faithfully and accurately conveyed. On the other hand, icons can also be compared with the apocrypha, not only because artists often drew their inspiration from these Gospel narratives (for example, the Nativity of Christ or the Assumption). In the same way painters frequently created pictorial apocrypha. This is the most poetical aspect of early icon painting.

Certainly an icon is not a (mere) picture or a photography; the icon does not represent what the painter sees before him, but a certain prototype that the painter has to follow. "Reverence of an icon stems from reverence for its prototypes. Icons are kissed, they are expected to heal and work miracles. They are worshiped because they are representations of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints. Icons play a part in the Church ritual. Icon painting is to a certain degree a ritual art" (Alpatov 1973, 7).

We can approach icons as to old and modern cultural phenomena. It is possible to recognize the transformation of their meanings, when the aesthetic values of icons grow and the ritual function diminish. The definition "worship icon" is seldom used in the Orthodoxy theological context. Like in the testament from the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (787 AD.) we find "veneration icons" used. But in modern Orthodoxy theology this function of icons is recognized mostly as old and so not actual now.

If human culture is understood as a corporate undertaking in which people succeed in establishing a distinctive style of living based on common values, it can be seen that much of what is distinctive in Christian faith emerges from its dialogue with it. This dialogue is inherent in its relationship and takes place not only between Christians and those who do not share their faith but also among Christians themselves (Jenkins 1983, 137).

One of the important functions of icons is to make dialog, dialog-prayer and monolog-prayer between the person and God. This function of the icon as a dialog is developed by the priest Pavel Florenskij. His life and service was a heroic deed. He shared destiny with a lot of honest, noble and well-educated priests and died in 1937 in the first Soviet camp GULAG in Solovky monastery.

Florenskij appeals to the concept "mystical return perspective" which in the theological conception was the way to show the icon as the temporal, permanent and internal dialog. According to him, the icons are visual explanations of the "primary body of all". In many ways he based his own transcription of icons on the philosophical and theological ideas by Aristotle, Basil the Great and Thomas Aquinas. He wrote: "Icon appear as a light from heaven. It is opening the ability to see by spiritual sight. Then we read in them the message from the Gospel in the reverse form from  $\Omega$  to A. This reading brings for us the possibility to follow deeper and

deeper the idea of highest beauty and in the end of this to come close to the idealistic beauty of the light of God” (Florenskij 2001, 35 [my translation]).

In the western scientific resources the definition of icon(s) is some times different from the resources which are in use in the East tradition and have a narrower understanding. It shows the small comprehensive analysis, which I suppose to do. One needs the interaction between two or more linguistic systems in order to find each concrete situation for the adequate reading.

“Icon is a painting by a Greek or Russian Orthodox (1) believer (2) on panel (3), generally of a religious subject strictly prescribed by tradition, and using an equally strictly prescribed pattern of representation (4). An authentic icon can be of any age from the 6<sup>th</sup> century to the present day” (*Dictionary of Art Terms* 2003, 116). I would like to comment on and make some corrections to this definition, which may in turn help us to find compromises in a common understanding of the main subject of discussion – the icon. (The numbers show which part of the definition which are discussed). The books *Dictionary of Art Terms* (2003), *The Oxford dictionary of Art* (1988) and *The Oxford Companion to Art* (1970) in the definition “icon” all have the references just for Greek or Russian churches.

The term “Orthodox Churches” (1) in it’s conventional historical sense designates those Churches of the Christian East that: accepted and have maintained the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon, hold on to the historic ecclesial and liturgical traditions of Byzantium and are in communication with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (Maloney 2003, 10: 679). The fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451 AD.) used the term in formulating the definition of the hypostatic union: of Christ’s human and divine natures.

The structure of Orthodox Churches consists of many national churches which have different statuses. Among them is Ukrainian. (Some times Ukraine is confused with Russia, the more powerful neighbour in the north). In Ukraine, like in all Orthodox Churches the icon plays an important role. From historical approach the icons tradition came from Byzantium to Kievan Rus in the 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, which now is Ukraine. Afterwards this development moved further north in Russia with the center in Moscow in the end 14<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Ukraine we have long tradition for using icons in liturgies, have good and rich collections of icon paintings in the museums and also we have our own solid scientific school which has worked with this subject since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For this topic I use three books Ukrainian authors: *Art of*

*Kievan Rus* (Aseev, 1989); *The Ukrainian Icon. Spirit of Ukraine* (Hordynsky, 1992); *The Story about Icon* (Ovsijchuk, 2000).

The role of the icons in the Orthodox Church is much wider than only the liturgical one. A lot of people belong to the Orthodox Church without (actively) believing (2) or practicing their faith. This situation is common for most modern churches. According to this the following is not a correct statement: "Icon is a painting by ... believer".

Yet, icon is a painting on panel (3). But the panel is only the material, not more. It is just surface. "Icon is the outline of the phantom. Icon coincides by the outline with the holy image and in our consciousness it creates the image. Outside the image and without our ability to imagination – icon is panel" (Florenskij 2001, 15 [my translation]).

Icon is first of all the theological idea about incarnation. It is a big mistake therefore to think that orthodoxy believes in icon and worship panels. The Orthodox believe in God. The mistake is the thinking of icons as the *description* of God. The Orthodox do not read and recognize the icon directly. The main aesthetic position of icons has connection to Antique ideas. In the old Greek tradition was the link: body, mind and spirit which had a linear constitution. The Orthodox idea about images was based on this principle, but this system has developed into an abstract circle.

And the last correction of this definition is: "Icon ... a pattern of representation (4)". The representation has the meaning of function here. The classical Orthodox theology designated the main function of icon. Among them the function of representation does not exist.

This proves that it is necessary to search for a mutual interaction and a joint understanding of certain terms.

The icon painting is a holy art. It is an art spiritual in its essence and its aim. It has seven functions: to enhance the beauty of the church with a beauty which is holy; to instruct us in issues belonging to the beliefs of the Orthodox Church; to remind us of this belief; to show us the prototypes, the gallery of holy characters; to help us imitate these character's good qualities; to help us reshape ourselves; to serve as means, to come to the dialog-pray to God and value his saints (Ware 2009, 225).

In order to find a common definition of "icon(s)" I suggest to follow the next statements.  
Firstly,

Icon, from the Greek *eikon* meaning image, is a word now generally applied to paintings of sacred subjects or scenes from sacred history. As established in the Byzantine Orthodox Church icons were a liturgical art, theology in visible form. By presenting the physical appearance of a holy figure the icon itself became imbued with the sanctity of its divine prototype, serving as an object of religious contemplation and as a conduit for the prayers of the faithful (Jones 2003, 7:278).

Secondly,

The icon has a double definition. The primary one is function: icons are images venerated as holy in the Orthodox Church. But to modern viewers the icon also implies a specific form: icons are panel painted on a golden ground. The icon as definition in functional terms has been integrated to Orthodoxy since at least 843, the end of the era of Iconoclasm; on the other hand, the relation of holy images to the painted panel is far less clearly understood, and the assumption that the Orthodox image was always embodied in this medium should be resisted. Medium, like shape and themes, was a means by which the icon negotiated the demands of historical change (Carr 2004, 143).

And thirdly,

In the eyes of every Orthodox Christian, holy icons are more than artful and historical objects. They are a vital entity and a vibrant presence in the liturgical life of the Church, which is the very context that sanctioned and fostered their creation, existence, and use from early Christian time. When seen in this light – the icons’ multifaceted dimensions and intrinsic meaning can be approached, assessed, and revealed with a new fullness of significance, and the creative act of the gifted individuals responsible for their facture becomes a part of the act of the living Church, proclaiming the truth of the Incarnation of the Logos, the Word of God (Damianos 2004, 335).

Between the definition of “icon” and the form of its translation into English – “image” – is a huge gap. This distance was measured by time and its philosophy. When we speak about the phenomenology of icon, it is practical to remember, that this definition was developed and established on the background of Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophies and that the discussion took place in the Byzantium in the 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. But the discussion about the definition of ‘image’ had as background the philosophy of Francis Bacon, David Hume and John Mills.

In this situation it is possible to compromise: in the more restricted sense in which “icon” is generally understood, it is a holy image to which special veneration is given. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite wrote in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century: “Icon is visual transforming of mystery and supernatural sight” (Lihachova 1981, 22 [my translation]). “Icon puts on the Angels robes”, this is an old Slavic saying. “Icon is the window in the World of God” (Florenskij 2001, 6 [my

translation]). All the time icon as a object is bigger than itself, if it is the appearance from above, or smaller than itself – if it is the painted panel.

## **2.2 Historical causes for establishing icons**

*The body of the church is the loftiest, most rich, and most beautiful that can be seen in whole world...so great is the edifice, and the wonderful works in the church are so numerous, that they take a long time to see.*

*Rue Gonzales de Clavijo Castilian envoy to Constantinople in 1403*

Searching roots is always exiting and comprises dramatic moments. To search the special roots which during the time were transforming the cultural tradition is therefore a real challenge. Here we can try to frame the problem of origin and development of the icons in Early Christian period. For approaching this problem it is better to start with making an attempt to find the historical, philosophical and artistic context of the early icons.

Christianity is not a simple religion of spirit, but it is a religion of the Holy Spirit. This is a very important difference in the definition. Its ideal is not the action of the personal creative energy, but confession and way for conscience sake. Ideas about this dominate in the Eastern Church as the collective activity in the Christian life which was recognized in the church as a “body of the Heaven on the earth”. Probably, therefore, in the very beginning Christian art applied to community and in the first functions was social.

Liturgy became the metaphoric way if locating heaven from the physical universe into the visible earth. “The liturgy cycle ensured that the passage of ‘ordinary’ time is constantly overtaken by eschatological, or what we might even call ‘cosmic’ time” (Davies 2004, 21). Art plays a huge role in the realizing of feeling, which was associated with the liturgy and sacraments of the church.

The early Christian world was full of reminders from antique time. It was really a big historical pot, which reflected the new Christian creation. New ideas demanded new forms and methods of doing new things. But at the same time, the world was permeated with the ideas of Plato. The knowledge of the artists and the abilities of the craftsmen had the previous epoch as background. Very often new ideas were presented by the old forms of art. Proof of Roman



superiority in the art crafts declared by the special style that they mixed themes from Christianity and pagans views. This was the time for collaboration and the creation of a new language of art. In many ways in these early years the amount of pagan art was dominating, but during the few first centuries the proportion of correlation was changed to the side of Christian art.

Search for the new ideals in art had a secondary character and was dependent of the ideals, as the philosophical category. Specially revealing is the definition “ideal” which was used for the first time by Martianus Capella. His study about “The Seven Liberal Art” made in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, had a big impact on the Christian art even until the Renaissance.

While western Christianity was in its deepest humiliation, the Eastern Church was enjoying its greatest strength. Byzantine culture, the creation of the church, was in full flower, and Constantinople combined the intellectual glory of ancient Athens with the military might of Rome (Volz 1997, 72).

Constantinople’s Church remained the most civilized religious organization that the world had known so far. The language of verbal allegories and symbols was transformed by the Early Byzantium to the visual identification. The system of the symbols of hierarchy spheres got its explanation.

Mentally Constantinople was established as a symbol of Christian Glory. This Glory was made from Constantinople’s Church highest sphere. Hagia (Saint) Sophia cathedral became the symbol of the incarnation of the highest beauty on the earth. During time ideas about the ideal of the hierarchical sphere of beauty got the written formulation by Abbot Suger. “...metaphysics of hierarchy also supported a program of symbolic interpretation which constituted a return through material things to the source of all in heaven” (Davies 2004, 25). The system of hierarchy of the spiritual spheres and the symbol of three times beauty – Constantinople, Constantinople Church and Saint Sophia – had its place together with the dogma of the Trinity. It was reflected as the glory of the new belief.

This dogma had a very special place in the theological discussion during the entire medieval period. Gamma as the third letter of the Greek alphabet was one of the oldest conventional symbols of the Holy Trinity. The Trinity as a dogma of Christianity is not mentioned in the New Testament, although the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all found there. The concept of the Trinity was used by Teofil from Antiochia the first time in the 2<sup>th</sup> century. His manuscript

“Message to Avtolyky” is preserved as a text which dates to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. “...three days, which were before the creation of planets, they are the essence of the image of the Trinity. They are the essence of God, Logos and his Wisdom” (*Teofil from Antiochia* 1895, 34 [my translation]).

Here the word “wisdom” was used in a special prefix to reinforce this meaning – “*premydrost*” (*премыдрость* - Russian). The equivalent of it in English is “super”. So it is possible to translate this to super wisdom. But I would like to mention, that in the Russian and Greek languages there still exist two different prefixes with mean “super”. The prefix “*pre*” (*пре* - Russian) is accepted in the Christian and Church terminology. Another one “*sverx*” (*сверх* - Russian) – is the equivalent of super, which is used only in the secular language.

The first visible image of the Trinity we can find is located in the St. Vitale’s mosaics in Ravenna. The story about the images represented at the Hospitality (Philoxenia) of Abraham (Genesis 18:1-15) was described in the altar. “Two scenes of Abraham combined into one composition, the first showing Abraham serving his three visitors (probably intended to represent the Trinity), and the second showing Abraham about to slay his son Isaac as sacrifice. The imagery and the liturgy here are in perfect harmony – the first non-verbally reflecting and interpreting the language, action and symbols of the second” (Jensen 2000, 765).

Ravenna is really a unique place which keeps the memory about one of the first pages of the Byzantium art. It was possible to preserve the art here thanks to the circumstance that the town was far away from Roma and Constantinople.

It is a pity, that in the center of Byzantium, in Constantinople, we can not find many examples of early Christian art, except in the Hagia Sophia cathedral (built in 532-537 AD.), whose interior and exterior were changed dramatically during the next centuries. Much of the art materials from the capital has been lost during wars, outbreaks of iconoclasm, and the continuous urban renewal of the city.

Mosaics in Ravenna and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople were created in the same period. But the last one has not survived. It was a golden period of Byzantium run by the emperor Justinian. The mosaics in Ravenna were made parallel to the theological disputes in the capital and the theological discussion in the Church Councils. They are one of the first visual images in Christianity as a religion, bringing together idea, institution, meaning of incarnation and aesthetic

form. These mosaics are the expression of the spiritual, Christian tendency towards transcendence and the absolute. They are the confirmation of the philosophical idea that the world has a tendency to variability but does not have a tendency to be a better one.

The mosaics in Ravenna are important for studying early icons. Because we have very few examples of the oldest icons and the oldest of them are dated to the 6th century. The mosaics show a quite wide specter of themes and scenes taken from the Old and New Testaments and also from the texts of the old Church. They show the development of formal tendency from the voluminous images, which dominated Rome and were applied to the sculpture, towards the flat images, to which painting were applied. It is important to keep in mind that this painting was “writing” and not “paint”. Afterwards this tendency would be realized as one of the significant norms of the icons in the classical period. The style of the mosaics in Ravenna in the 5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> centuries is in many ways the same as that of the icons. This style we can recognize like a language with a lot of expressions and rules.

I would like to notice that the new Christian ideas used the Antique artistic language like tools. And they got a quite quick development during a short period. It was reality, facts and life. The formation of the visual spirituality was made through the creation of sacred images. And this assertion was directly connected to the transmitting of tradition. One of the most important characteristics of Christian art is that it is addressed to and reflects a narrative source. The art did more than merely illustrate the written sacred texts.

In the early Christian art we can recognize two trends, one towards abstraction, and the other towards symbolism. The fish became one of the oldest symbols of Christianity, because in Greek the word “fish” is formed from the initials of the expression ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour’ and so was read and interpreted as an acrostic. This symbol of Christ arose casually; it is possible to tell, on the confluence of linguistic circumstances. But it was fixed owing to the arrangement as one of the basic symbols of the Christ for some centuries. The function of art was to interpret and reinforce the meaning and key symbols of the Christian faith.

“Very gradually these two tendencies (abstraction and symbolism) became dominant, and when we reach the Dark Ages, the 7<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> centuries...we have a figurative language which verges on total abstraction” (Zeri 1990, 52). Here we can recognize the parallel tendencies in the Western and Eastern part of the early Christian world. In those days the connections and

relations were absolutely natural. It is also practical to remember that Byzantium art, with the dominant idea about highest beauty had a big influence in the all directions of Europe. In this case the parallels were: Dark Ages – Iconoclasts; a figurative language of total abstraction – when Iconodules won their point in 787 AD. And 843 AD.

The early Christianity, despite the presence of common Neo-Platonic features, essentially differed. Christianity started with the recognition of a contrast between the terrestrial and the heavenly, matter and spirit. The spiritual world was recognized as the primary world. And, due to this, each subject was considered to be harmonious if it represented the creative thoughts of God.

For example, “it was a doctrine of Neo-Platonic philosophy, taught by Porphyry among others, that visible image could show forth invisible truths of religion” (“Icon”. In *The Oxford Companion to Art* 1970, 554). This attitude of the educated mind was gradually changing, and by the time of Justinian, in the middle of the 6th century it was normal among educated Christians to regard the sacred images as objects for veneration and contemplation, although there is no evidence that they were worshipped or invoked. Parallel to this, but not to be confused with it, was a popular development of the portable image as a cult object with close affinities to the miracle-working relic. “Taking care not to fall into idolatry, Christians used visual images as identity with community, to enhance their worship, to inspire and educate, to aid devotion, or even to give honour to God and the saints” (Jensen 2000, 769).

On the Council in Trullo (692 AD.) in Canon LXXXII it was written:

In some pictures of the venerable icons, a lamb is painted to which the Precursor points his finger, which is received as a type of grace, indicating beforehand through the Law, our true Lamb, Christ our God (Agnus Dei (Lat. “lamb of God” (John 1:29)). Embracing therefore the ancient types and shadows as symbols of the truth, and patterns given to the Church, we prefer “grace and truth”, receiving it as the fulfillment of the Law. In order therefore that “that which is perfect” may be delineated to the eyes of all, at least in coloured expression, we decree that the figure in human form of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, Christ our God, be henceforth exhibited in images, instead of the ancient lamb, so that all may understand by means of it the depths of the humiliation of the Word of God, and that we may recall to our memory his conversation in the flesh, his passion and salutary death, and his redemption which was wrought for the whole world (In *A select library of Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14: 401).

The same synod was also dealt with the veneration of the image of the cross.

Icons as one stream of early Christian art was developed in their context. Concerning the origin of the icon history it is possible to find two sources which are based on legend and reality respectively. *The legends* have a view of the miraculous nature of icons which were considered to be *acheiropoietoi*, that is 'not made by human hand'. The legend of Abgar, the king of Edessa, authenticates the traditional image of Christ. Such icons were imprinted with the feature of Christ. This legend tells the story about the events which took place in the beginning of the 1st Century but was written during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century in Syriac text and called the "Doctrine of Addai". In the collection of the Monastery of Saint Catherine is the icon "Abgar holding the mandylion with the image of Christ" which is dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

By the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century the veneration of icons had reached its culmination and a reaction set in. The consequence of this reaction was that only very few icons remain from the period before the Iconoclasm. For the Orthodox Church these rather few icons have a great importance. But in a wider scope they belong to the world's culture treasures. "The origins of Christian icons and their veneration can be traced with surely only to sixth century – the date of the earliest surviving icons – but textual evidence documents their earlier use. Eusebius, the fourth-century bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, writes of having some icons of Christ and his Apostles" (Jones 2003, 7: 278). Several medieval manuscripts keep mentioning the existence of icons from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Today, the biggest collection of old icons is presented in the Monastery of Saint Catherine, known more accurately as the Sacred and Imperial Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount of Sinai. Here the collection of Byzantine icons is the riches in the world, and it includes the greatest number of 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries encaustic panels which survived the scourge of Iconoclasm. It is the oldest continuously inhabited Christian monastery in the world. The geographical isolation of the site, the perfect climate conditions as well as the zeal of the monks contributed to the preservation of the liturgical objects that are accumulated over the centuries within the fortified wall of the monastery.

Five icons from this monastery were taken to Kiev (Ukraine) in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the bishop Parfiriy Uspenskiy, who was on a religious mission in Sinai. These icons suffered during the periods of the Russian revolution, the First and Second World Wars and during the

long period of communist attacks on the church and all its liturgical artifacts. Miracle or opportunity gave them a chance to survive. Now they are present in the Museum of Foreign Art in Kiev. During the year 2000 they traveled the entire year from Paris to New-York and Tokyo.

In the early Christian and medieval period it was quite normal that icons traveled from place to place. Many of the icons from Sinai were moved from different places before they reached this final place of dwelling. Hence it is really challenge for the scientists to identify the places, cities or monasteries where these icons were written. It is the assumption that the two icons from the Kiev's collection the "Virgin Mary with child Christ" (Album 2) and "Sergios and Vach" (Album 3) were made in Constantinople.

It is possible to suggest that the origin of icons has connection to the culture of Fayyum. The word "Fayyum" refers to a very fertile region southwest of Cairo. When we look at the map we find that the distance is not so big between Fayyum and three of the oldest monasteries in Egypt, namely St. Antony's, St. Paul's and St. Catherine's. Today, the region is as well known for its many "Fayyum portraits", uncovered by archeologists. Their development was in the period 4<sup>th</sup> BC. – 2<sup>th</sup> AD. Those portraits are clear examples of the mixing of the latest period of Egypt's culture with the younger cultures of Greece and Rome. In this period Egypt lost the ability to and know-how of making mummies, and thus these portraits became some kind of compromise solution for funeral purposes. These portraits were apparently also used to decorate homes. "Art historians often credit the Fayyum region with the birth of realistic portraiture and the many portraits uncovered in this region represent a time of groundbreaking artistic experimentation" (Hawksley 2007, 28).

Florenskij also conjectured that the roots of the icons were possible to find in the Fayyum portraits. "Historically, icons have the most lasting connection with Egypt. Here icons started and here was created the main forms of icons. They started from realistic portraits. But it is necessary to keep in mind that this realism had the distinguishing feature of relative realism. Even it was idealistic realism which was developed fast in the symbolic and abstraction form of icons"(Florenskij 2001, 64 [my translation]). According to Florenskij the Fayyum portraits and icons had a common function -- "to them were made veneration" (Florenskij 2001, 66 [my translation]).

Both Fayyum portraits and early icons were made by using the same technique. The encaustic involved melting wax and mixing it with pigmentation and perhaps linseed oil or egg, then applying it like paint onto wood panels. Icons were made with this technique until the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Using an egg as a linking substance has therefore had a long usage when making icons. Egg is still an important ingredient in the traditional icon's technique as tempera. The prevalence (as well as necessity) of using eggs in icons for such a long period reflects the symbolic meaning which the egg has had -- and still has -- in Christianity. It is a symbol of raising from the dead to eternal life.

In this context the egg became one of the existential but not visible symbols of Christ. Eggs have never had a substitutional or additional meaning to the images of Christ. In Russian language the resurrection (revival) and Sunday is the same word -- *voskresenie* (*воскресенье*).

The encaustic technique used the colour pigments mixed with wax. Since this wax must be warm the painters used open fire under a ceramic table, where the wax was melted in small pots. Using the fire for making icons also had great symbolic meaning. It was especially important for the monks of St. Catherine monastery, where there still grows a bush which reminds us about the Bible events and is the symbol of Moses' burning bush (Exodus3:2).

All early icons were made on cypress panels. The choice of type of tree was not made arbitrarily. The cypress was an old symbol of internal life and imperishable due. Ancient Egypt's sarcophaguses were made by different types of wood which were able to fit work with volume. The work with this material demanded from craftsmen that they apply painting of a surface which was flat and make a balanced sculptural form of the sarcophagus as well as a decorative painting. Icons have since taken up this method of painting. But in its original Egyptian sarcophagus usage it had no theological explanation.

The treatment of the wood for the sarcophagus and the icon was in principle the same. Gesso was used on both of them. A lot of technical, artistic and composition devices were the same. They were inherited from the sarcophaguses and from the next step -- Fayyum portraits. "Sarcophagus is literally the artistic body. Icon as a cultural and historical phenomena inherited the task of the ritual mask. Afterward it developed this task to appear for eternity the Holy spirit which were realized through the saint persons" (Florenskij 2001, 56 [my translation]).

Compositions of the early icons are simple and monotonous. Usually, on those icons were presented only one holy person. They were half-length portrait's icons. Early icons present the idea about the "highest beauty" as it was done in the mosaics. But in this type of images, where there is distance between the person who is praying and the object of the prayer, the visual contact is more close. Always when referring to the icons as objects of prayer we must, however, keep in mind that this is an *indirect process*. Icons as a ritual art are more intimate and may be compared with the wall decorations in churches (including the iconostasis) (see 3.3).

The holy persons painted on icons are looking out of the picture with wide and brooding eyes; and this intense gaze, which assists communication between the image and its worshipper, has remained a constant feature in the later, more stylized icons throughout the Christian world. For the description of icons a Greek word was used – *prosopa* (*προσωπον*). It literally has the meaning "face" and "character" and this word was translated into 'person' in English and in Russian *litso* (*лицо*).

Russian language has three definitions – *lik* (*лик*); *litso* (*лицо*); *lichina* (*личина*) – which in English translation corresponds with 'image', 'face', and 'mask', respectively. In Greek the closest meaning to – *lik* is *είδος, ιδέα* – which means 'idea'. This is the most suitable context for understanding the picture and portrait in the icons. They picture not the image of the holy person but the *idea* about him or her. The idea was the abstract form which was realized in the "face" and the "character" of the icon. In this context the idea is very close to an ideal and to the highest visible realization of the "highest beauty". The wish to reach the level of the "highest beauty" reflected Plato's philosophy.

Christ's divine nature was the primary focus of the devotion, as can be seen in the iconographic figure of the Christ Pantokrator, the All-Ruler who presides in the Orthodox churches from the height of the apse. An icon with Christ Pantokrator from Sinai (Album 1) is dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. This is the oldest icon with this iconographic type, which has had a very high status in presenting the idea about Christ. This icon represents the pure idea and is one of the clearest examples of an "existential reading". Its proper function is initially didactic, eventually the spiritual and mystical functions are added in this icon.

The 7<sup>th</sup> century gave very few considerable and interesting monuments and icons. The culture was declining. In 730 AD. the emperor Leo III promulgated a decree enjoining the destruction of



all sacred images in human form, but his decree was not a movement against the “holy beauty” as a theological idea. The most concerned attempt to eradicate icon worship was made by his son, Constantine V, who set himself to destroy every kind of icons, except the symbol of the Cross (Carr 2004, 145). Led by the Iconoclasts, the attack on the cult images became the attack on as such. Their central tenet was to act against idolatry, toward which the use of icons had developed in the previous period. We can see in this process a clear tendency toward transforming the meaning of icons.

Starting as a small movement in Armenia in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, iconoclasm came into the Byzantium in the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. But it attracted a special imperial support when the patriarch Nicholas I in 768 AD. commanded that the mosaics be removed from St. Sophia. The activities of the iconoclasm supporters were not turned against the monasteries and churches as institutions, but they struggled against their property. As their weapons they chose the destruction of the icons. This shows how big an influence icons had in the society at the time.

The beginning of the “breaking images” period shows also little theological basis for the support of iconoclasm. From Asia Minor also came some influence of the Islamic culture. Leo III, probably, was aware of Islam’s opposition to the human figure in art. It is doubtful that the emperor could use this argument against icons at the time when Byzantium was suffering from the Muslim world.

In any case, it is impossible, as sometimes presented, to recognize the iconoclasts as a certain uneducated horde of people which smashed the great monuments of Christian art. Iconoclasm was under construction on the basis of deeply developed and refined theological and aesthetic theories. The Iconoclasts were supported by the emperor, bishops and also the higher clergy of Byzantium, while the Iconodules (Iconophiles) were the clergy of the lowest rank, the monastic communities and laymen.

The policy of the iconoclastic emperors, despite the ruin and abuse it cost, make a positive contribution to the joint development of the Byzantine Church and State since it fostered an increase in the prestige of the patriarch through an awareness of dogmatic autonomy. Meanwhile, the victory of the orthodox brought with it a revival of sacred art, made icons more popular than ever, and entailed a concentration of religious feeling on the humanity of Christ (Nicks, Gouillard 2003, 283).

Iconoclasm was the logical ending of the early period of the origin and development of the icons. But eventually the deep theological discussion between Iconoclasms and Iconoduls opened a new page in the icon's history, which got the name the "Golden Age" of icons.

### 2.3 Theological discussions about the idea of icon

*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me...*

*Exodus 20:4-5.*

The use of sacred images of persons to which they point has a long and somewhat complicated history. Christian use of images began early, while the religion was still proscribed, and only received an impetus with the recognition of Christianity as a state religion in 313 AD. During the several following centuries the special Byzantine style was crystallized, a development which made it include in itself elements from the latest antiquity and early Christianity. The nature of Byzantine and its society was based on traditions, dogmas and hierarchy. On the top of the hierarchical ladder was the emperor. The emperors were the general symbolic expressions of Byzantium as a state. Partly its idea was inherited from the Roman empire, but the reverent attitude to the very image of the emperor also developed greatly in Byzantium. Byzantine emperors had the principal titles Basileus and Augusta.

Imperial panegyrics dutifully reflected the official propaganda line, but they also expected some return for their services. Similarly, the ceremony of adoration, the kissing of the purple, instituted by Diocletian on the end of 3th century, although criticized at the time as evidence for oriental absolutism, enabled the emperor to show favour to a subject, as well as allowing the subject to pay homage to the emperor (Harries 2000, 1:36).

The forms of adoration of emperors were soon reflected also in the forms of veneration of icons. The ideas of framing Christianity as a part of the state law was necessary in order to establish the position of emperors. "In 438, Theodosius II issued his attempt at a general codification of imperial law, the Theodosius Code, which included, in Book 16, as collection of imperial laws issued by emperors from Constantine onwards on a subject which had never before been formally recognized as a distinct category of law – Christianity" (Harries 2000, 1:36).

Thus the emergence of the Christian cult images at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and during the 6<sup>th</sup> century was stimulated partly by the veneration paid to the imperial effigies in the Roman Empire. The image of God in honor and dignity had the same formal methods of description as the image of the emperors.

After victories the emperor would enter a city by foot and before him on a chariot with white horses was carried an icon of the Virgin, glorified as the true winner. In order to demonstrate the dignity and glory of the emperor as a representative person of God, he must sit on a double throne. From Monday till Friday the emperor was seated on the right side of throne, but on Saturday and Sunday he had to sit on the left side. It was the symbolic idea that the emperor might share a throne with Christ. On another part of the throne, and near by the emperor, was the cross as a symbol of Christ. From the 6<sup>th</sup> century some times instead of a cross on the throne was lying an icon with the image of Christ the Pantokrator.

The idea of demonstrating Christian humbleness by the emperor was also very important. Having come to the throne, the emperors were obliged to choose marble for a future sarcophagus. On the great Thursday the emperors washed the feet of twelve poor men in Saint Sophia cathedral. During the service in the cathedral the emperor held in his right hand an attribute of the state's power – skipetr-skeptr (Greek: “holder of power”); on the left hand was – *akakia* or *anexikakia* (Greek: “without guile”), a small bag with earth or dust from a grave as a symbol that the real world is transient. It also intended to remind the emperor of the ephemeral nature of life and its glory. “The idea of greatness gradually passed in the negotiation: in the idea of Christian humility”(Dmitrieva 1969, 131 [my translation]).

To Byzantium was the supremacy of the emperor in matter of religion as well as state. Constantine himself had called the first ecumenical council; each of the six subsequent councils, all held in the East, was likewise convened by emperors who promulgated their decrees as imperial law. The concentration of civil as well as religious power in the hands of the secular ruler has been called caesaropapism. Eusebius saw the state as the protector of the church and the emperor as God’s vicar on the earth, His image to whom the church owed support and gratitude. Emperor and patriarch were to work in harmony for the welfare of society, as Emperor Leo VI wrote in the ninth century: “The peace and felicity of subject in the body and soul depends on the agreement and concord of the kingship and priesthood in all things” (Volz 1997, 69).

This shows that Byzantium kept stability in the public attitude to the personal image of the emperor in quite a long period. The Church played a big role in the creation of this imposing function of the emperors authority.

The First Council of Nicaea (325 AD) is commonly regarded to have been the first Ecumenical council of the Christian Church. Most significantly, it resulted in the first uniform Christian doctrine – “symbol of belief”. In creating of the Creed the first position was taken by St. Alexander of Alexandria and St. Athanasius. They took in account the nature of Christ as (Greek) *Homousios*, one true God in Deity with the Father. The theological expression – The Son of God is the original image of the father, made by Alexander of Alexandria, was taken later by John Damascus.

“Byzantine Christianity emphasized the incarnation of Christ and the mysteries attending the relationship between Christ’s human and divine natures. The saving nature of the incarnation is most clearly expressed in the words of Athanasius: “God became human that humans might become divine.” (Volz 1997, 70). Athanasiaus struggled against the Arians in Nicaea and was the winner in this theological discussion. “Similarly he has in fitting manner transferred the rest our bodily experiences to himself; we cease to be men, and by becoming the property of the Word, we share in his eternal life” (Wiles & Santer 1975, 56).

Arianism, advocated by Arius (who died in 336 AD), was declared as a heretical doctrine. It was condemned by the Council of Nicaea. “Arius disputed the Christian doctrine over the divine nature of the son of God (Logos), who was generated and therefore not equal to the Father, thus denying the divinity of Christ and the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son” (Matino 2006, 129). In Ravenna was saved the visual version of the Arius theological point of view. In the Baptistery of the Arians at the central medallion' of the cupola is shows the Baptism of Christ (Album 4). A naked, youthful Christ wearing an absent expression on his face. He is immersed in the crystal-clear waters of the River Jordan. In his “sculpture” face it is possible to find much more from the antique version of the reading images of eternal young gods. But his imperfect naked body symbolizes sin. Here, in this image of Christ dominates the presentation of his nature as a human being. It is a very seldom type of iconography.

St. Basil the Great in the 4<sup>th</sup> century wrote: “Writers and painters set forth the great deeds of war; the one by word, the other by their pencils” (Ovsijchuk 2000, 134 [my translation]). In this

period there was a quite sharp polemic about the parallel development of thoughts and images of God. The motivation of this discussion was in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians: “He is the image of the invisible God; his is the primacy over all created things”: Colossians 1: 15.

St. Basil referred his meaning as an opposition to ideas of Eusebius, the bishop of Ceasarea. “Eusebius, following Origen, sees the function of the Word as that of mediator between the ultimate God and creation. For this theological tradition the Word is, as mediator, necessarily subordinate and inferior to the Father” (Wiles and Santer 1975, 48). Eusebius had denied the idea about images of Christ and did not see in them the possibility to be a mediator. He was dominated by the tendency to divide between the values and meaning of the Word and the Image.

Also in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Epiphanius of Salamis was devoted to this tendency which developed later into Iconoclasm. He “claimed that images in churches distracted Christians from the contemplation of purely spiritual matters” (Nicks and Gouillard 2003, 7: 281).

Cyril of Alexandria became noted in the history of Church, because of his spirited fight for the title of St. Mary as *Theotokos* (Greek) – “God-bearing” during the Council of Ephesus (431 AD). Cyril of Alexandria is one of the central figures in the dogmatic mariology of all times. His image in iconography is that of Cyril standing, holding the icon Theotokos. In Byzantine theology the Theotokos means Bearer of God. For the establishment of this title to the Virgin he was in a polemic with the theory of Nestorius. The doctrine of Nestorius was based on the idea that Jesus has relative connection with the Son of God. He divided the one Son and one Word of God into two sons. Nestorius called Vergin Mary – Bearer of Christ. His position was that it is impossible for a human to bear a God, because God is eternal. Cyril explained his position in the Second letter to Succensus. He wrote: “...he was incarnate is a clear and unambiguous confession of the fact that he became man, there is nothing to prevent us from thinking of Christ as being the one and only Son at once both God and man, perfect in deity and perfect in humanity” (Wiles and Santer 1975, 69). In several writings, Cyril focuses on the love of Jesus to his mother. His teaching got the mariological development where the blessed Virgin Mary was regarded as the Mother of God. After this discussion Theotokos became the saint patron of Constantinople.

Some icons wept, bled or worked miracles – the latter sometimes on a regular schedule, as is documented by accounts of what is called ‘the usual miracle,’ performed every Friday night by an icon of the Theotokos in the Blachernai church in Constantinople (Jonès 2003, 7:278).

The icons were officially accepted on the Chalcedon Council (451AD). Probably they came in use at first by the Coptic and Ethiopian Churches. On this Council the Orthodox concept was accepted. “It was based on the idea ‘I believe because it is absurd’ by Tertullian (160-220 AD), who has been called ‘the father of Latin Christianity’. The Orthodox version of this saying was translated as ‘I believe because it is miracle’ (Ware 2009, 243). This key expression was taken into the discussion, and in a while got its development in a special way by Orthodoxy. Miracles became some kind of attribute of the appeared icons.

It had its background in the idea about the spiritual opposite to the material nature where harmony existed only in the spiritual form. Overcoming the opposition between spiritual and matter natures was possibly realized in two ways. First of all through the dogma of Incarnation and next by the Orthodox ceremony.

In the Bible the image of God has distinction with the likeness of God. In the Chalcedon Council was made the theological explanation of those definitions. By the image was a thinking about the ontological gift of God and the spiritual nature of human beings. But by the likeness was thinking about potency and possibility to the spiritual perfection” (Florenskij 2001, 18 [my translation]).

The reverence to icons and the creation of icons were put on a strictly regulated basis by the Second Council in Nicaea (787 AD). But icons were finally restored to a place of honour in the Church as late as 843 under the Decree introduced by John of Damascus at the Council of Constantinople. Between the processes of acceptation and adaptation icons in the liturgical use could count almost 500 years. And in this entire period emperors and their environment on the one side and the authorities of Church on the other, spent a lot of time in disputes, where directly or indirectly icons were a part of the discussions. They were extremely important tools for the realization of the Church. It showed how difficult it was in the process of adapting the icons into the process of fixing their theological and aesthetic meanings.

The Iconoclasm controversy started under the leadership of emperor Leo III, with his first demand to remove the icons from the gates to Constantinople. “Iconoclasm was based on the First Commandment and other biblical passages and iconoclasts were genuinely concerned that increasing devotion to icons would lead to idolatry” (Nicks and Gouillard 2003, 7:280).

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image...”: Exodus 20: 4-5. In the Russian version of the Bible this sentence, instead of “carved image”, uses a word which can only be translated into English as ‘idol’. In Russian it is – *kumir*, кумир, which however, does not mean ‘idol’. In Russian language there exist two words – *kumir* “кумир” and *idol* “идол”. They have different definitions. The first one is used in the meaning of action, and more close to idolatry. The second is used in the meaning of an object of idolatry. Some times it even has the meaning of an ancient sculpture. One of the important arguments of the Iconodules was that icons had a special form of expression and that the image had to be painted, not carved. The painted icons were flat and this was included in the concept of the icon and also realized by a technique.

In Byzantium, we do not know exactly in which century the definition of eidolon (Greek: εἶδολον) but it was probably before the time of Iconoclasm. It connoted pagan images as opposed to icons, or Christian images.

Scripture and the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical councils together were considered the basis of the Orthodox faith. In addition to Scripture and the Councils, theological tradition is also authoritative, including the writings of theologians. Perhaps the most authoritative of these is John of Damascus (d.749). John taught the divine maternity of Mary, her exemption from original sin, and her bodily assumption into heaven (Volz 1997, 71).

John of Damascus made a new exposition of doctrinal truth. His style of writing has an encyclopedic character. He made a big contribution to the theological explanation of the icon's nature. In the introduction and protection of images, John of Damascus developed a new, original theology, based on tradition.

John was able to defend the veneration of images unhindered outside the empire by means of his three famous discourses, which laid the theological foundation of the future. Although he was condemned by the synod of Heiria (754), which was opposed to images, the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (787) not only rehabilitated him but based itself entirely on his theology of images (Drobner 2007, 542-543).

John understood the terminological problems and sharp the differentiation of the types of images which were adopted by the Second Council of Nicaea. The position of John of Damascus about the icons are still actual and still in used by the Orthodox.

John initially differentiates the concept of προσκύνησις as simple “admiration”, befitting creatures, and as “worship” (προσκύνησις κατὰ λατρείαν), befitting God alone. In no way does the προσκύνησις of images of God and his saints refer to the object, however, but always to the person represented, who, according to the ancient tradition, is present, as it

were, in the representation of the image. Only because of the presence of the Spirit of God do images possess grace and effect (Drobner 2007, 544-545).

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was greatly in debt to John of Damascus for his methodology. Pavel Florenskij in the 20<sup>th</sup> century took into account a lot of John's theology.

On the Second Council of Nicaea applying to icons is using the terminology “holy and venerable images”. Those special accents were made as the reaction not only against the Iconoclastic theology but also against the Iconoclastic policy with its exaggerated bureaucracy and their violent attitude against art in the churches. “So also no prince or secular official shall rob the churches, as some have done in former time, under the pretext of destroying image” (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14:545).

In the first session of this Council Basil of Ancyra said: “Anathema to the calumniators of the Christians, that is to the image breakers. Anathema to those who apply the words of Holy Scripture which were spoken against idols, to the venerable images. Anathema to those who do not salute the holy and venerable images. Anathema to those who say that Christians have recourse to the images as to gods. Anathema to those who call the sacred images idols” (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14:534). In our times the tune and formulations of these statements look very radical. But we need to remember the historical context. And this context was – theological war. In the war enemies normally are aggressive to each others both in their actions and in their words.

Theodore, bishop of Myra said: “I venerate and honour and salute the reliques of the Saints as of those who fought for Christ and who have received grace from him...” (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14:534). When the Empress Irene together with Tarasius, patriarch of Constantinople, prepared the background for this Council the meaning was to create a reconciliation between the Eastern and Western Churches by establishing a common custom. The reliques had an important place in both Churches. It was common attitude that they as objects of holy history could educate Christians about the virtuous deeds of Christ and the saints.

The same bishop continued: “I am well pleased that there should be images in the churches of the faithful, especially the images of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the holy Mother of God, of every kind of material, both gold and silver and of every colour, so that his incarnation may be



set forth to all men” (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14:535).

“After we had carefully examined their decrees (here in Constantinople 754)” (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14:543). This shows that the Iconodules were quite good prepared for the discussion with their opponents, the Iconoclasts. It was explained by the level of theological disputers. In order to avoid the chance of being refuted the second time, they studied properly all the arguments of the Iconoclasts against the images, as possible objects of idolatry.

This Council made three definitions of the icons, namely as a “divine image”, “venerable images” and “image” (εἰκόων). “The venerable images (εἰκόνας) of Christ, in his humanity he assumed for our salvation” (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14:533). “If anyone ventures to represent the divine image (χαρακτήρ) of the Word after the Incarnation with material colours, let him be anathema!” (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14:545).

As a consequence of this council, then, was created the theology of painting icons. They used forms and colours, but it was of principal importance to remove everything in the icon from the materialistic world. Icons might be reflecting and reminding. Their nature is an abstract language with the symbolical meanings of form and colours. And the way of creating icons is through mediation and prayer.

It was a great challenge to find this compromise between the veneration of icons and the limitation of veneration or relative cult of them. The same can be said about finding the compromise between the verbs they made use of - namely *to adore* (λατρεύω) and *to venerate* (προσκυνέω).

The Council decreed that similar veneration and honour should be paid to the representations of the Lord and of the Saints as was accustomed to be paid to the “laurata” and tablets representing the Christian emperors, to wit, that they should be bowed to, and saluted with kisses, and attended with lights and the offering of incense. But the Council was most explicit in declaring that this was merely a veneration of honour and affection, such as can be given to the creature, and that under no circumstances could the adoration of divine worship be given to them but to God alone (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14:526).

And a very significant explanation was made, which closed the way for the possibility of committing idolatry through the veneration of icons. Because the concept of *veneration* does not mean the same as *worship* and between them lay a clear theological formulation. “When then the Council defined that the worship of “latria” was never to be given to any but God alone, it cut off all possibility for idolatry, mariolatry, iconolatry, or any other “latry” except “theolatry” (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14:526-527).

This Council of Nicaea played an extremely important role for the next period in the history of the Orthodox Church. Important for us to keep in mind is, that this Church Council was the last one in which the Orthodox Church was declared as Ecumenical. The Orthodoxy was bitten not once in the history for the veneration of icons, kissing of them. Kissing is just a cult, happens to occur. Theolatry is the worship of God and Orthodox worship is except from the context of icons.

Theodore of Studios (d.826 AD) was another influential theologian, a vigorous opponent of iconoclasm, who supported church independence from law control. His energy and organizing genius made his monastery at Studios the center of the reform in the Eastern Church. He began restoring the monastic discipline. Soon the monastic community, as a movement for the restoration of images, was able to protect their own ideal and stay against the second wave of Iconoclasm.

The Synod of Hagia Sophia (815 AD) and the Church decree (843 AD) finally renovated the holy images and Iconoclasm soon disappeared entirely from the Byzantine society.

In the question of images Thomas Aquinas referred first of all to St. John of Damascus and to St. Augustine. “Image’ does not appear to be a personal name in the godhead. Augustine teaches that the divinity and image of the Holy Trinity, after which man is created, is one. ‘Image’, then, is an essential, not a personal term” (St Thomas Aquinas 2006, 7:43). The definition of Christ as a person or friend is therefore totally prohibited in the Orthodox Church until now.

As far as an image is always a reflection of the likeness (ὄντιτυπος) and reminder about a prototype (πρωτοτύπος) the understanding of it is, that it is the image of the image of God. The image of images has the meaning of superiority but definitely not the meaning of the double copy. “Likeness is of the essence of an image. Yet not just any likeness matches its meaning, but

only a likeness to another either in species or in some mark of a species” (St Thomas Aquinas 2006, 7:43).

In the terminology relating to icons John of Damascus followed the tradition of Greek theologians who employed the term ‘image’ to the absolute likeness of the Holy Spirit. The idea of Thomas Aquinas is:

The Son is the Image of the Father in the first manner; man is the image of the God in the second. In order, therefore, to bring out that there is less of an image in man, Scripture does not just say that man is made the image, but made to the image of God, thereby implying a kind of process tending towards completion. Because the Son is the absolute Image, on the other hand, he cannot be said to be 'to the Father's image'" (St Thomas Aquinas 2006, 7:47-48).

This meaning corresponded with the Gospel of John:

He entered his own realm, and his own would not receive him. But to all who did received him, to those who have yielded him their allegiance, he gave the right to become children of God, not born of any human stock, or by the fleshly desire of a human father, but the offspring of God himself: John 1:11-14.

Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) represent the German late medieval school of theology. Like Thomas Aquinas he also made a commentary to John of Damascus' conception of images. “Eckhart argues that if the Son is of one essence with the Father, though different in person, then the just man is the 'offspring' (*proles*) of justice, and is one essence with justice, though different in person. This to apply the dynamics of the inner-Trinitarian relations to the Creation itself, and it serves to emphasize the extent to which the transcendentals, for Eckhart, remain *within* God” (Davies 2001, 62).

In the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the traditional values were reviewed during a single generation. The solid medieval world exploded and revived by the national identities. In the German art came the new trends which had a serious approach to life itself. The time demanded from society that the Church must change not only in its institution, but also in its teaching. Erasmus Roterdamus came with the idea that people need to start with reading the Bible, as it was the truth. He printed the Bible in Latin and thus created thousands of new readers.

Albrecht Dürer was the invention of the Great German myth. In many ways he was a strange and uncomfortable man for his epoch, but he moved his own epoch ahead. He painted his self portrait in the traditional pose of Christ. He used the image of Christ only as inspiration. His

characteristic is accurate, not symbolic or abstract. In the same time, in Italy, Michelangelo created the idea that “heroic spirit is visible”(Clark 1969).

Parallel with this in the history came Luther with the emotional relive: “Here I stand” (Clark 1969). He came like the leader of a popular movement with the declaration of the new civilization not based on or inspired by the images, but the period of “Sola Scriptura”. The tools of thought in this period became accessible by printing the Bible in the German language.

In the Orthodox literature we can find accusations of of Luther, that “he destroyed the theological and aesthetic attitude of the icons” (Ware 2009, 134). But we need to be exact in our definitions. I think that the Orthodox Church used this message more in a political rather than a religious sense. The orthodox definition of icon is not the same as the image. This situation needs a correlation. Luther was a bright person, but it is natural that he corresponded with the medieval and contemporary art, which was settled in the German church. This art has very little to do with the liturgical Byzantine art. At the same time, the Orthodox Church was active in preventing these images which came to East Europe from Germany. Because the Orthodoxy were thought about the images from the West as an art which did not correspond to the theology of icons.

When Luther taught about the images, he had reference to the Iconoclastic Controversy, initiated by emperor Leo III. Luther used only the word “image”, but not “icon”. At least only the concept ‘image’ is used in the English translation.

Luther wrote about images that, “...we must come to the images, and concerning them also it is true that they are unnecessary, and we are free to have them or not, although it would be much better if we did not have them at all” (Luther 1966, 51: 81). “The text says, ‘You shall not make any images,’ then they say: It also says, ‘You should not worship them’. In the face of such uncertainty who would be so bold as to destroy the images? Not I” (Luther 1966, 51:82).

If we go back to the decrees of the Council of Nicaea we can also read: “... the worship... was never to be given to any but God alone”(A *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 1974, 14:526). In his sayings Luther was calm regarding the use of images. But public reaction was much stronger and the protest started to be destructive. For example, the sculptures from the Lady Chapel in Ill in France were smashed. During this movement, several monuments were also destroyed. These cultural artifacts of incomprehensible value were never

recovered. But their destruction was not motivated by the Luther's religious view itself, but by people's instinct to destroy.

In "The Letter to the Christians at Strassburg in Opposition to the Fanatic Spirit" Luther wrote: "He (Dr. Karlstadt) pounces on outward things with such violence, as though the whole strength of the Christian enterprise consisted in the destruction of images, the overthrow of the sacrament and the hindering of baptism"(Luther 1966, 40:67). In another letter Luther continued the discussion with the same opponent. "When Karlstadt disregards my spiritual and orderly putting away of images and makes me out to be only a 'protector of images', this is an example of his holy and prophetic art, though I only resisted his factious, violent, and fanatical spirit" (Luther 1966,40:85). Standing against the fanatical attitude, Luther showed his position to images, as representing external things. In any case he prepared the way for finding compromises, but did not himself harbour the fanatical destructive position.

His, in principal new ideas, were shaking all Europe. The ideas had place and influence on the canonical icons and their protection. As a reaction to the protestant movement a big gathering activity of icons started to take place in the Russian Church in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

At the Moscow synod of 1551 (*Stoglav* in Russian "hundred heads") the authenticity of the icon tradition was the focus in violent disputes. In the decree of *Stoglav* great emphasis was put on the role of the painters in the process of creating the icons. The painters were given strict rules as a reaction to the new influences which started to develop with regard to the painting of icons. In chapter 43 of this decree the following three statements were the most important for the painting of icons: 1) the Fathers of the Russian church gave their own vision of the problems they saw developing in the icons; as such it was the first official negative critic against the influences of modernity in this process; 2) as the weak side of the new development they identified the tendency to concentrate on small details which destroyed the unity of the compositions and to the wish of including contemporary information in the icons' context; 3) instead they decided that painters or writers of icons should follow the best examples from the "Golden Age" of icons. *Stoglav* censured the people who called themselves icon painters but did not have enough knowledge about the art and were not educated properly for mastering it properly. "Prototype and once again Prototype – was the main message of the *Stoglav*. And this

was the only way to protect the icons from their destruction. But icons were in the process of losing their eternity and universality” (Pokrovskij 2000, 157[my translation]).

The 1553 synod confirmed the legitimacy of icon types based on human and theological treaties. The sacramental subjects of icons became much wider. But the main reason for this synod was an attempt to test the situation of the icons painted after the Stoglav's decree. The intensity with which the synod was gathered is the best proof for the fact that the icon painting tradition were facing serious problems – the influence from the modernist West.

In the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century came the first examples of visual descriptions of God the Father. As a reaction to these images the Moscow synod of 1666 stated that the image of God was forbidden for visualization. Up to our days, icons of God the Father are controversial. It became a challenge for the icon tradition when their formal construction started to be destroyed from within the church. And there was no chance of a reanimation of the icons or of reinforcing respect for the classical canons of icon painting when the secular movement grew so strongly. The theological discussions about icons finished when the object of these discussions exhausted its own resources. And the logical end for the classical icon tradition came when icons were confined to their historical potential. The classical period, when icons dominated the artistic life of Eastern Europe, was over.

#### **2.4 Iconography: subject, method and themes**

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

*Genesis 1:27*

The wider definition of iconography is determined by science and method. The narrower narrow definition is determined by the code of rules, norms and variants of the different themes and topics. The wide definition of iconography involves a study of icon interpretation, description and an interpretation of the content of images. Also the narrow definition can be said to have a similar scientific function, but it is restricted only to the icons in the context of Orthodox Church tradition. The discipline of iconography came late in the architectural study.

The word “iconography” originates from two Greek words “eikón” – icon, and “grapho” – to write. Iconography has been used as a scientific method mostly for the researches of the medieval and Renaissance periods.

Theologians and Church historians take the view that icon painting is in fact the presentation of Church dogmas in visible images. Icons have their traditional canons which, like religious dogma, must be implicitly obeyed. And following these canons is therefore very important, both as a dogma and also as a tool for creating icons. The traditional process of making icons is not technical or emotional – it is primarily guided by prayer and knowledge. “The definitive *horos* (“decision”; - Canons) in the theology of icons, were published by the Seventh Ecumenical Council” (Felmy 2009, 388).

There is some reason for the iconographic approach to the icon – an approach that is widespread even today.

Icon painters did not usually invent their subject as painters do. They followed an iconographic type, developed and established by customs and the Church authorities. This is why icons are representing the same subject, even when centuries apart, are so like. The artist was considered to have a duty to follow the examples gathered in the so-called manuals – “*podlinniki*” (*подлинники*) (Alpatov 1973, 14).

In Russian *podlinnik* has the meaning – genuine or authentic.

*Podlinnik*'s were the old manuscripts where the monks acted as artists. History has saved two types of *podlinnik*'s – the practical and the theoretical. Possibly these books were in use as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century. But the oldest one in existence now is from the 16<sup>th</sup> century only. The practical manual – *litsevue podlinniki* “лицевые подлинники” with the exact definition of Orthodox icons is the book with schematic drawings made for helping the icon painters.

Most famous is the Greek manual manuscript of Dionysius from the monastery in Fyrnu. Dionysius most probably lived in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but his books in the Athos library are dated from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These books were rewritten many times and thanks to the diligence of unknown monks, who made these copies, the old texts are preserved today. The Dionysius' manuscript consisted of three chapters. In the first one he made detail explanations about the technical characteristics of icons, described different methods and gave several recipes for making icons. In the second chapter Dionysius gave information and notes about how to make

the images based on the Old and New Testaments. This chapter has a precise character of iconography. In the last chapter he describes the methods of making wall paintings in the churches. "Dionysius was not the creator of the Greeks' manual, but he made the collection and systematization of the icon material which was in use" (Pokrovskij 2000, 119 [my translation]). The French archeologist Didron visited Athos in the 1830's and was under influence of the unexpected beauty which he found in the monastery. In his book "Iconography chrétienne" (Paris 1843) Didron had references to the Dionysius manuscript.

History also gives us the name of an icon-artist Alimpius, who lived in the monastery Lavra in central Kiev in the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. His name is associated with the development of the iconography school of Kievan Rus (later Russia and Ukraine) (Aseev 1989, 58). He created the special type of "the Theotokos" – The Mother of God in the cave. Legends and the historical manuscript "Nestor's codex" tell about Alimpius and his icons. Nestor and Alimpius were contemporaries, both lived in the same monastery, and both are buried in the caves of Lavra. Probably, the contribution of Alimpius to iconography was so great that his name was mentioned in the Laurention codex (end of 14<sup>th</sup> century) and the Hypation codex (15<sup>th</sup> century).

In Lavra's depository are kept the books from the art studio from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries – *kunzbushki* (кунцбѹшкѹ), which means the transforming word – Kunstbuch from German – art's book. These books have a lot of practical advises, outlined step by step for the painters who were to study the different themes in iconography and its schemes.

The Russian's *podlinniki* – Sijskij and Filimonovscij – are dated to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Their work represents a rich material with a lot of iconographic schemes. "Podlinnik from Sijskij monastery is one of the best examples. It's advantages are the huge collected base, the quality of drawings and list of the artists" (Pokrovskij 2000, 225 [my translation]). The same meaning as *podlinniki* had in Russia, Iconology (icon – "image" and logos - "word", "reason") had in West Europe. "Iconologia" is the title of Cesare Ripas handbook of personifications for the use of artists (1593). He was the first one who used this terminology. "For Ripa iconology consist of the description of the symbols and personifications used in emblems and allegories for the purpose of aiding artists" (Enge 2003, 288). In the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries several iconographic schools were formed. In the critical "reading" of the images Heinrich



Wölfflin (1864-1945) suggested to use iconography as a formal analysis. Max Dvorak (1874-1926) proposed to frame the same definition as a history of spiritual development.

In the discussion about iconography one finds the following statement: “Although religious art activity in the East was often controlled by canons, that of the West revealed a freedom and a progressive development” (Enge 2003, 285). I think that using the definition “progressive” in connection with the art of icons is conditional or even doubtful. The idea of development, as a continuous changing of canons for icon painting, is conceptual nonsense in the context of icons. Because in the case of icons they go out from and are based on prototypes.

It is very interesting to compare Eastern and Western points of view regarding the main figure in Christianity - Christ. “The icon of Christ, which is the crown of all icons, renders palpable the mystery of the Incarnation of the Logos, not simply as a reminded, but as an organic part, an extension, and a perpetuation of it” (Alpatov 1973, 336). “The figure of Christ is a subject that has continued to develop uninterruptedly over two millenniums, and it is among the richest and most varied themes in Christian art in the West (oriental Christianity, under the aegis of the Orthodox Church, poses radically different problems)” (Zeri 1990, 15).

A comprehensive introduction to the study of Orthodox art was made by the Byzantinists G. Millet, C. Diehl, Andre Grabar and Fyodor Uspensky. *The 'Dictionnaire d'archeologie chretienne et de liturgie'* wrote by the Benedictines F. Cabrol and H. Leclerq, which appeared between 1907 and 1953 in 15 parts (30 volumes), constitutes the most valuable single source of iconographical data” (Enge 2003, 286).

In the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Fyodor Buslaev(1818-1898) reproached early Russian painting for lagging behind the Renaissance in the West, for “lacking the correct draughtsmanship, perspective and colours range, rendered intelligible by light and shade” (Buslaev 1913, 152 [my translation]). Today these reasons are not convincing. The aesthetic approach to icons has proven that icons have had valuable qualities of their own, and that icon painting was an art in its own right.

Nikodim Kondakov (1844-1925) made a contribution to the development of the icons of the Virgin Mary – Theotokos. His writing was based on the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria, who was one of the early promoters of mariology. In the book *Antiquites de la Russie Meridionale* (published 1891) he made descriptions of the 300 iconographic types of the Theotokos icons.

This is the most complete collection with such high numbers of icon types and examples. Methodologically Kondakov has in this book extracted the data on each of the types through identifying and verifying the icons on the basis of their belonging to different times and periods of history.

Pavel Florenskij (1882-1937) wrote *Iconostasis* in 1921-1922 and this work cost him his life. In his book Florenskij showed the theological and historical as well as theoretical approaches to the world of icons. He created the synthetic method for analyzing icons, a method which combines the religious thoughts and art expressions. He distinguished between the investigations of the icons' form and the interpretation of their content or meaning. In his theoretical approach Florenskij was methodologically close to the ideas of Edwin Panofsky.

Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) stressed the semiotic approach to the history of art. The term 'iconology' was adopted by Erwin Panofsky to distinguish his broader approach to the analysis of meaning in the visual art of iconography. "The definition 'history of meaning' was his primary statement of the iconological method and as the standard definition of the concepts iconography and iconology" (Klevaev 2007, 106 [my translation]). His method consists of three levels of scientific research: First, the formal analysis of composition, colour, drawing and so on; second, the verification of themes according to the exact priorities of iconography; three, the study of iconology as cultural and ideological associations. On those positions he based his book *Meaning in the visual arts* (published 1955).

### **Main themes in Orthodox icons**

In the following I shall list some of the main themes in Orthodox icon tradition. Striving to penetrate the iconographic foundation I have chosen among numerous and varied motifs, the most constant, stable and universally significant ones – the most popular. Basically we may say that *the main themes of the Orthodox icons are divided in three groups: (1) Christ and Mary, (2) figures from Old and New Testaments, and (3) the Saints.*

*Among the Christ icons the following themes are the most popular ones: (a) Christ Pantokrator (Album 1; 5) (Greek for "all-sovereign": epithet of God as well as of the individual persons of the Trinity. It is designates the best known type of Christ image, bearded and represented frontally. Christ blessing with his right hand while holding the Gospel book in his left); (b) Deesis (Album 8; 9) (Greek for "entreaty": representation of Christ between the Virgin*

and Saint John the Baptist); (c) *Not Made by human Hands* (Album 6) (according to the legend about Abgar); (d) Christ the King of Glory, Man of Sorrows or *Akra Tapeinosis* (Album 7) (Greek for “utmost humiliation” (Isaiah 53:8) depiction of the dead Christ displaying the wound of the Passion, known in the West as the Man of Sorrows); (e) *Christ Anapseon* (Greek for “the reclining one”): depiction of the Christ Child reclining, resting his head on his right hand and holding a scroll in his left. It has common features with Christ Emmanuel and it is a prefiguration of Christ's Passion); (f) *Christ the High Priest*, a depiction of Christ combining dual attributes symbolizing his temporal and ecclesiastical authority. In the realization of all these types we find a combination of the theological ideas or theological disputes about Christ and their reflection in the icons at the time when the icons were written.

*The following scenes, reflecting the life of Christ, are most popular:* the Annunciation (Album 10), the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple, the Baptism with the name of Christ (Album 4; 11), the Transfiguration (Album 33), the Raising of Lazarus, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Crucifixion, the Anastasis (Album 12) (resurrection), the Ascension (Album 13), the Pentecost, the Dormition of the Virgin (Album 35). Although the last one is dedicated to Mary the figure of Christ has the central part in its composition. Christ stays with the baby who is symbolizing the soul of the Virgin. Some of these scenes with Christ were based on the canonical texts of the New Testament, and other ones – on the apocryphal motives.

*Also the icons with the Virgin are very popular in the Orthodox tradition.* Here images are compulsory elements in every church. The description of her images are based on the texts of the Protevangelium and on the dogmatic teaching – mariology.

It is noteworthy that the Protevangelium's interest in Mary is not properly biographical (by contrast with medieval lives of the Virgin). It does not continue her story beyond her role in the salvation history, which it does not extend beyond the birth of Jesus. Its interest is solely in the way Mary was prepared for and fulfilled her unique vocation to be the virgin mother of the Saviour (Bauckham 2000, 2:796).

*The types of the Virgin Mary in iconography are as follows:* (a) *the Virgin Hodegetria* (Album 15) (Greek for “guide”; an icon of the Virgin holding the Christ Child and gesturing to him with her free hand, as the way to salvation); (b) *the Virgin Eleousa* (Album 14) (Greek for “compassionate; an icon of the Virgin in which she tenderly touches her cheek to the Christ Child – most famous is “The Virgin of Vladimir); (c) *the Virgin Kykkotissa* (a Cypriot variation

on the Virgin Eleousa); (d) *the Virgin Blachernitissa* (the iconographic type has depicted the Virgin, reproducing an icon once kept at the Blachernai Church in Constantinople); (e) *the Virgin Dexiokratousa* (Greek for “right-handed”; an icon of the Virgin holding the Christ Child in her right hand); (f) *the Virgin Galaktotrophousa* (Greek for “wet nurse”; an icon of the Virgin nursing the Christ Child); (g) *the Virgin Glykophilousa* – of Tenderness (Greek for “sweet kissing”, a variant of the icon of the Virgin Eleousa. The term focuses on the activities of the figures); (h) *the Virgin Nikopoios* (Greek for “bringer of victory”; an icon of the Virgin featuring a frontal bust of Mary, holding a medallion with a frontal figure of Christ); (i) *the Virgin Platytera* (Greek for “wider than heaven”; an icon of the Virgin in an orant pose); (j) *the Virgin of John of Damascus* ( Mary with three hands); (k) *the Enthroned Virgin and Child* (Album 16).

As one can see from the different types of the image of the Virgin the most dominant theme is where she presents her child-Saviour to the world. By presenting this action of hers iconography took its message from the mariology of the church and described her types as different functions of hers in presenting Christ.

Among the types I have listed there were several particular favourites. They became favourites because they seemed to be able to express the innermost hopes (and feelings) of the people. One is the image of the Virgin and Child, enthroned, against the background of a multidomed church, and surrounded by an assembly of the people, glorifying and exalting them - “In Thee Rejoicing” (Album 18). This type has been widely used in all different traditions of the Orthodox church – as a type which combines the visible with the invisible prayers of adoration in liturgy. Another type has a purely Russian origin - “The Shroud” (Album 17). Here the Virgin is patron and defender of the people and spreading her veil over them. Thus, in one case we have the exultant mankind hailing the Virgin, and in the other mankind turns to the Virgin in search of help and protection. These icons might be called convocational, as they depict convocations of many people of various ranks who are united in expressing hymns to the harmony. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century an iconographic type of the Virgin was created which was derived from both of them – “The Virgin – is the Empress of Earth and Heaven”. Historically this type was established parallel to the theological recognition of the Virgin as a patron of Russia.

*Other popular icons contain scenes from the Old Testament: Moses (Album 28), Elijah and The Hospitality of Abraham (Album 29), which was used as a first iconographic type of the Trinity (Album 36).*

*Also we find scenes and persons from the New Testament: The Four Gospels, Symeon Theodochos (Album 27), John the Forerunner, Peter and Paul (Album 20), the Archangels Gabriel (Album 22; 23) and Michael (Album 24; 38), Synaxis of the Apostles Album 21), (the Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles, and the Apocalypses were often used.*

*The Saints were hosiou or hagos (Greek for “holy man”): Most common were the Saints George (Album 31), Theodore Stratelates, Nicholas (Album 30), Boris and Gleb, Demetrios, Georgius, Anastasia, Catherine, Theodosia, the Saints of Stylite, and the Fathers of the Church. This type of icons is divided into two groups: (1) the single or collective images of the holy person(s) (they are close to portrait(s)) and (2) the Vita icons with scenes from the life of a Saint.*

*Special types were: the Holy Trinity, the Triumph of Orthodoxy, and the Illuminated Gospel.*

The iconographic system of icons was the formation of a self-sufficient text. But it is important to remember that this text had secondary nature and was itself a reflection of the literary plot – the pre-text. The literary basis was first of all the Old and New Testaments, the Canon Tables (the system of establishing concordance between the Four Gospels), the dogmatic texts of the Fathers of the Church, Pateriks (from Greek *Paterika* - “books about” the fathers, that is collections of hagiographic texts), the Protevangeliums, the Apocrypha, the Holy Legends about the Saints, the Euchologion (Greek for “prayer book”, a compilation of texts required for the celebration of the liturgy).

“In the exact definition of iconography it [the icon] was made only by holy persons. We can suggest that a big part of the Saints were involved in the process of the creation of iconography. According to their spiritual experience, the Saints hold the leadership among the painters of icons and were their preceptors” (Florenskij 2001, 24 [my translation]). This we may refer to both as a theologically and historically oriented definition. When tracing the icons’ history and types we know that icons come from different places and may be dated to different periods, but it is possible to recognize all their main types quite easily. Each of these types give us clues to reading them and for finding their message but so do the themes and the colours (and gold) which are represented in them. Also, if we are able to understand their (contemporary) historical

context well and know well their textual pre-texts, then we can interpret their textual as well as historical context.

This chapter consists of a lot of information about the cultural, spiritual, aesthetic and scientific nature of icon. This objective information, as a historical data collection, I used for own analysis and reflection, which gave me the possibility to signify several conclusions. 1) Phenomenology of the icons does not give chance to make only one precise definition of icon. Its nature apply to the flexibility of their definition which is connected to the different levels of its functionality. During the historical time, the transforming of icons' meaning was clearly recognized in the different attitude to them in the West and East branches of the Christianity. 2) The finding of the roots of icons, both cultural and technical, open the perspective to its analysis as an aesthetic and social origin of icons. 3) A very important question of understanding phenomenology of icon is the theological discussion which took place from the first period of establishment of icons and which still can be actual. (The Orthodox Church during the 20<sup>th</sup> century unsuccessfully tried to organize the 8<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council. One of the question for these theoretical disputes were proposed the – icon, as a remain of the Prototype and icon, as an action of veneration). 4) Iconography, as a reflection on the icons reality, is a historical archive of the written text of icons with a lot of plots, scenes and schemes; a part of the scientific method of the icons study; one of the tools for reading the icons messages.

My opinion is the the advance of icons (phenomenological nature) that they need several approaches for the deep understanding. It is not possible just using the scientific method to answer: for what, why, how, where and when – is icon. In the next chapters I will give some other points of view of the object of our main discussion – Icon: Text and Context.

## Chapter Three

### THE LANGUAGE OF ICONS – METHODS OF READING THEIR MESSAGES

In this chapter I suppose to do the complex and comprehensive analysis of the main rules of the icons language. Here will be the discussion about the canons which formalize and determine the technical level of their language which has a background in its theology. The category “time” and “space” I will signify as the elements both from the theology and canon. The last ones is in a big degree the form of the realization and reflection of the idea about the Prototype as a form and light of the “highest beauty”. I will take in discussion the architectural space of the churches as the most common place for the icons, where they communicate with the general form and decoration of its interiors and also communicate with the people, who pray to God. Icons bring to the people aesthetic and theological reminders about God.

#### **3.1 Principle of the universal space and the eternal time in the icon's creation**

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.*

*Genesis 1:26*

The icon painting of the Golden age – the 10<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> centuries – appeared with a clarity of language. In fact icon painting is a great, mature art, based on a profound understanding and great artistry. It is very difficult to rely in words, because everything in it is expressed through the specific icon's form. The different forms of icon painting have a specific inner meaning. A special understanding of the linear design, composition, space, colour and light was evolved.

In many ways the beginning of the Golden age of icons in the Byzantium and Russia had parallel features. In the 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries the icons were quite big in size (nearly 2 meters high) and in the form of presentation they often resembled frescoes. The majestically calm figures were depicted in frontal poses gazing at the viewer. An epic calm reigns in these icons, but towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century images became more dramatic.

“However, even as Russia was developing its own traditions, its church remained strongly influenced by movements within the Orthodox Church, especially hesychasm (‘quietude’; a movement whose followers sought communion with God through contemplation,) which reached the land through Mount Athos and via refugees from the Balkans” (Evans 2004, 11). The hesychastic tendency (the 14<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) in the art was brightly realized by Theophanes the Greek who had a big impact on Russian icons (see 4.2).

The hierarchical ladder or the pyramid was the pivot. The integrity and the subjugation of parts – that was considered the basis of the world order, and the means by which to overcome chaos and darkness. This idea found its expression in the compositional structure of every icon. The Byzantium churches were understood as a likeness of the world with the heaven above. Its domes were the interpretation of the sky. In this perspective the theological thoughts were based in the Early Byzantium system of hierarchy. Only then, after the period of Iconoclasm, this idea became more sound and got its realization and stabilization in the “artistic canon”. According to the idea about harmony in hierarchy, almost every icon was looked upon as a likeness of the Church, the model of the cosmos. But here also modifications were possible . In one icon heaven seems to descend to earth, while in the other everything earthly strains to reach heaven.

Speaking in a purely Sinaite vocabulary, it can be said that icons substantiate in form and colours the veritable truths contained in The Ladder of Divine Ascent of Saint John the Sinaite, who is also known as Saint John Klimax. This book, written in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, became the most popular text of the Orthodox Church after the Holy Scriptures and the service books (Damianos 2004, 335).

In the icon with the “Heavenly Ladder of Saint John Klimax,” (Album 25) made in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, there is a kind of description of the victory of the Iconodules and the theological explanation of the importance of icons. We have mentioned that icons call for an “existential reading” on our part, an openness of heart and spirit. In St. John Klimax (Album 26) remains a certain tension between body and soul, and a profound insight into one of the most moving and humanly compassionate passages in the Ladder: “What is this mystery in me? What is the meaning of this blending of body and soul?” (Damianos 2004, 339). In the example of this icon, Byzantine culture achieved one of its most highly sophisticated expressions and formulated also the pictorial language and the formal alphabet that would convey the message of the Incarnation through icons.



The book and its visual version – the icons – embodied the Christian focus of veneration. “We ‘record our salvation in deed’, that is, in depicting the holy icons, ‘and in word’, that is, in copying the Holy Scriptures: these are the painted and the written records of our salvation” (Damianos 2004, 336). The way how the “collective portrait of mankind” was made gives the feeling that the icons are deeply rooted in the collective sensibility and memory of the living Church. This icon is stressing the memory about the “communion of the Holy Spirit”, and this feeling of community which is standing in prayer gives a concentrated meaning of the Orthodox icons in general (see 2.1).

The Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea said nothing about the technique of and the material to be used for making icons, but the themes of the canons were under discussion. The canon – *Horos* – had a fundamental meaning in the icons. If we regard this question from a historical perspective, icon painting just followed the tradition of relying on a canon in art and was the last one based on the system of this canon. It was inherited from earlier epochs like Egyptian and the art of Antiquity.

As in the previous periods, icons took in use its main form – the human body. Principally new for the Orthodox Church was the theological context which was added as the “old form in the new canon”. From a strictly theological point of view, the body of man is an entity to be respected ontologically. There is no body-soul dualism in the Orthodox doctrine: Christ's Incarnation closed the gap between Creator and creature, and man's body became the “temple of the Holy Spirit”, as the Apostle Paul wrote (I Corinthians 6:19). According to this statement the form of the body might have a symbolic meaning and be an abstract for the realization of an idea.

The main purpose of the Orthodox art's canon was the idea to reach the “highest beauty” which was transfigured through the Incarnation of the Logos. And this has been successfully translated into visual terms in icons. The icon raised “...painting to an art and a creative act is its power to ‘rephrase’ the perceived reality, not in terms of what is fleeting and corruptible but in terms of what is permanent and incorruptible” (Damianos 2004, 340).

The term “transfiguration” (μεταμορφωθῆς) was taken in the icon's canon as a creative form. From the art historical perspective the canon was the hard frame of the icons. The canon was even later named as a *conservative element*. The problem is that icons are impossible to study from only one perspective, since this will create misunderstandings in the discussion. On the level of the canon was only the appearance of the icons, and from the theological perspective the

main idea was to reach this canon. According to this canon the canon constituted an important stimulative element to help icons in general to keep a quite high level of craft.

The icon's canon is the product of the collective mentality, it was created by the intelligence of culture which was occupied by the theme of phenomenology and convention but not by the idea of perceiving and spectral” (Florenskij 2001, 36 [my translation]). Florenskij adds: “In canon forms it is easy to breathe. They (canons) excommunicate from every thing which are accidental (Florenskij 2001, 26 [my translation]).

*The nine most significant requirements of the canon were:* (1) the icons must be flat (which means that three-dimensional images were and are forbidden); (2) the clothes must be part of the body; (3) all forms of illusionism are to be avoided; (4) the reverse perspective is to be taken; (5) there must be an absence of shadows; (6) one must keep anatomical disproportion; (7) the eyes are to be large and sad; (8) there should be absence of personal characteristics; and (9) there should be a special attitude to time: eternity is to be reflected – not the surplus of time, and its absence.

Icon painting is a symbolic art. This opinion is widely held, and there are two levels of symbolism which are principal to icons. Both of them use an indirect method or level of reading their symbols. The first of them is the system of using conventional symbols which tell about exact definitions without big corrections in their meaning. This first level shares common features with allegories and conventional signs. This level makes it possible to take the information from the surface which are expressed by symbolic themes and motifs. Here, at this level one or more conceptions of religious teachings is/are conveyed in conventionally represented figures or objects. For example, a female figure on a winged throne symbolizes Sophia as the Divine Wisdom; a candle burning by a deathbed is a symbol of the human soul; while a cup is the symbol of sacrifice; and the Holy spirit is a dove.

Of course, we can understand the philosophical abstraction between the ideas and the images. These are good examples of the negotiation of meaning, not the directed meaning like it is. This level of reading the symbols is, according to the conception of the “historical meanings”, present in the conventional system which was suitable and actual in that time. Today it comes through as a historical rudiment which has its own structure or presuppositions for understanding in the case

when the reader has a “friendly relationship” with (that is, appreciates) the historical context and has a good knowledge about this subject.

The symbolism of the icon has a much broader foundation as the historical rudiments, and is not only concerned with individual motifs, but embraces the entire icon work. It is based on the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the idea that absolutely everything in the world is only covering the kernel, obscuring the true meaning. Such an understanding was highly fruitful for icon paintings. It assured the writers that in the writing of any object they could give an idea of many other things, and what was important, of the world as a whole. This system of symbolism presented (and represents now) the “existential reading”.

In the eyes of a casual observer, the world of the icon is limited. But the specification of the language of icons gives a different dimension to the “intellectual diving” into them. Some notice the themes and motives, the iconography, while others delve into the theological implications; others go even further and perceive even that which is beyond the existential world and the life of human beings. The icons acquire several meanings and their individual structures shows many layers. This makes the perception and interpretation of the icon difficult, but at the same time enriches its meaning. The secondary meaning was not added deliberately, but arose by itself. It is very volatile and elusive; it is often difficult to put into words, but this does not diminish its role and its very elusiveness gives it life and a quality of infinity. And this category of infinity is reflected “to the space and time in the icon's canon opposite to the category ‘quick and and short as a lightning’” (Dmitrieva 1969, 345 [my translation]).

Angels as a motive are widely represented among the icons painters. They were subordinated to a strict hierarchy in the Orthodox dogma. They appear in eternal quality as guardians, the helpers of man, and serve as agents between God and man and surround the throne of Christ the Pantokrator or the Virgin. They represent what one may characterize as an ‘impossible combination’ of feminine grace, the agility of a young man and military valour. It is very common in icons that angels as mediators look down on the world from above and that their inside eyesight are reflecting mankind. Their big eyes look sadly and in their grief about human beings we find a concentration of their important symbolical sense. The Archangel Gabriel (Album 23) , also known as the Angel with the Golden Hair, is one of the most famous Russian paintings from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Painted with the large, stylized eyes, the archangel looks away

from the viewer towards the mysterious and ineffable. From this perspective his purpose is not to stir human emotion, but to aid human meditation. “Detached but compassionate, he inspires the contemplation of beauty and purity” (Cooch 2007, 39). The golden head of his hair looks like as a nimbus.

The favourite figure in the icon painting is the circle, basically the ancient solar sign, a magic circle, the symbol of heaven, of the divine. Usually a circle was used as a nimbus over the head of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints. But in the icons, where there were normally several levels of reading, a circle also has different meanings. Angels very often keep in the right hand the sphere as their symbol or identity – the transparent sphere of the universe. In the Prophet Elias and the Fiery Chariot the red circle represents the higher range of heaven, attained by the Prophet, but so far inaccessible to his pupil. The circle is also present in the Old Testament Trinity (Album 36) like a mysterious melody, like sought after perfection. In the icon of St. George with Scenes from His life (Album 31) the wheel on which the body of the saint is tortured also has the form of a circle and, in the perspective of the icon's symbolism, the action of torturing the martyr was transformed and now reflects beauty.

The graphical metaphor is a common phenomenon in the icons. It poetically likens man to a hill, a tower or a tree. But apart from this the delineation may also be pictorially effective. The figures on the icon usually has anatomical disproportions and are designed in symmetry with special rhythmic forms. This special rhythmic system was based on the concept of harmony. In classical icons outlines do not only serve to denote the borders of objects, but also possess the ability to relate their inner strength and movement. Thanks to the linear rhythm, the angels in the Crucifixion of Dionysius (Album 39) (the Russian artist from the 15<sup>th</sup> century who was a monk in the Saint Cyril monastery of Belozersk) seem to soar in mid-air. In this understanding of linear design the Orthodox painters came close to the Gothic artists, who created their art parallelly in the same time, and had the same thematic field – Christianity. Thus even common features in the understanding of linear design were possible to find in the pictures of Botticelli. It is important to note, that icon painting has no restless, undulating confused or looped-like contours. The painters made – and make – sure that contours did not violate the general form.

Frequently the conventionality of the images is considered to be the most characteristic feature of icons. In order to understand and explain the peculiarities of the language of icons, one

should remember that almost every detail of the images also had the meaning of an emblem. And the function of the details in the icons was to remind the reader of the meaning. The reader was thus brought to see that this was not only a representation of a particular object or an event, but also a disclosure of its broader meaning and, consequently, a stressing of the elements which are most important for an understanding of the wider meaning of the image. The icons from the 16<sup>th</sup> century were more psychological in their characteristics, but lost at the same time the emblematic quality.

*Composition* is one of the strongest formal aspect of the icons. Almost every icon was thought of as a likeness of the world, and according to this they have a central axis. The icons often have the elements of a triptych in a building composition with dominating symmetry. The upper part is seen as the sky or Heaven, the higher ranger of the Saints life, while down below is earth.

In Russian language the earth in the terminology of icons has a special name - "*pozem*" (Russian: *позем*). On the earth stay only the holy persons. Important, however, is that the main structure of the icon, whatever its motif, influences its composition. "The skeleton of the icons' composition is quite rigid and this make their structure architectonic" (Ovsijchuk 2000, 25 [my translation]).

While dealing with the question of *the architectonics of the icon*, mention should be made of what is used to be called "*palatnoe pismo*" (Russian: *палатное письмо*), the drawing of buildings in the icons. They always represent aesthetic ideals and express the theological meaning about "a mystical reversal perspective". This idea about the reversal perspective is one of the explanations why an icon literally icons "turns its face"; it turns away from the reader into eternal time and looks into the universal space. "Icon is the metaphysic of existence. Here is no room for the empirical chance and here is only the inner connection with the Logos. A way to 'pre -understand' it is the mystical reversal perspective" (Florenskij, 2001, 40 [my translation]).

In this context, the flat style of writing icons should not be looked upon as a purely two-dimensional art. Elements of spatial depth appear in icons here and there. But icons have consistently followed the style which avoided the tendency towards three-dimensions which became normal and usual in Western Europe from the 14<sup>th</sup> century but originated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In this case it is useful to make a comparative analysis between the icon the Virgin of Vladimir (Album 14) (11<sup>th</sup> century) and the Rucellai Madonna (Album 19) made by Duccio di Buoninsegna (13<sup>th</sup> century). Between them is more than a hundred years distance. The icon presents an anonymity culture, which is reflected in the conceptual meaning that icon painters are mediators. This was also one of the special expressions of the icon language, while in the Renaissance the concept was the personal responsibility of the artist for their work.

The first of these two was probably made in Constantinople and transported to Kiev. (The Russians had been converted to Orthodox Christianity in their capital Kiev, now in Ukraine, in 988). The Virgin of Vladimir had now been moved from Kiev to Vladimir where it got its name and was later moved to Moscow. The iconographic type of this icon is the Virgin Eleousa. This icon reminds us about the Prototypes, both in appearance and in quality but also in reflection or realization of the idea of “highest beauty”. Judging from its formal, not technical characteristic, it is impossible to indicate what special place and concrete time it represents. Nothing in this icon has momentary effect. Mary and her infant Christ in this icon got the miraculous ability of preserving time and, as a consequence of it, they got a permanent, lasting quality – always actual.

The figures in the Virgin and Christ present the idea of the “dynamic in the static” which was one of the important general characteristics of icons. The two figures were presented in the matter when they were united in one general form. This unity got quality of the meaning here. They are symbols, which can be understood at several levels of one’s reading. In this icon is the absence of shadows; the large eyes of Mary realize the idea about the “reverse perspective” because she looks away from the viewer, as it was a characteristic of the icon the Angel with the Golder Hair. The figures of the Virgin and her infant Christ are calm. The face of Mary demonstrates sadness and this sadness is also a common characteristic in icons especially from the 11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The question, why in the classical period of the Greek icons so often were reminding about sadness, is still open. But this probably reflects a deep realization within the Church, that the nature of mankind is imperfect.

This icon has a common background of gold, which also has a symbolical meaning. (see 3.2). “The miracle-working power of this icon inspired many copies” (Evans 2004, 11). One of them is the icon Virgin of Vladimir, who is the patron of Moscow (Album 40) (17<sup>th</sup> century), made by

Symon Ushakov, the first official leader of the icon studio in Kreml. Only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the anonymity disappeared from the icon painting as a concept. This icon's composition has a lot of details, such as concrete historical persons, Moscow's churches, a tree with big roses, etc. This idea, of the protection of Moscow by the Virgin, was taken from the icons the Virgin Blachernitissa, which a long time ago had been called the protector of the Constantinople. Also, this idea was developed "in the homily of Philotheus of the Yeleazarov Monastery on the theme: Moscow, the Third Roma" (Alpatov 1974, 5).

For the understanding differences one must go back to the Rucellai Madonna, made by Duccio di Buoninsegna. "Duccio's interpretation of the Madonna and Child theme reveals an emphasis on form that is not seen in earlier Madonnas by other artists. The bodies of the Madonna and [her or the/?]their infant Christ are given realistic treatment, and Duccio makes good use of the light and dark shading to create the illusion of three-dimensionality. The Christ child sits convincingly on the Madonna's lap and gestures towards his mother – both innovative developments in paintings of this kind during the era" (Cooch 2007, 42). Icons as a special form of art, with its own structure of limitation, used the canon as a tool which it applied for the function of reminding the reader(s) about the universal space and the eternal time. By understanding tis form of communication one was able to recognize the messages of the icons. This icon language is partly forgotten, but the old icon language is nonetheless actual today.

### **3.2 The meaning of light and its connection to the colours of the icons**

*When a lamp is lit , it is not put under the meal-tub, but on the lamp-stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. And you, like the lamp, must shed light among your fellows, so that, when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.*

*Matthew 5:15-16.*

Pavel Florenskij has commented the words of Matthew about "...the good you do". From his point of view – the good you do (Greek: ὑμῶν τὰ καλά έργα) is "the harmonic, wonderful and positive activity, which makes a bright person is a reflected light from above. This light was shed to the first witnesses of Christ, to the first martyr and to mankind" (Florenskij 2001, 12 [my translation]).

According to Florenskij, the light is the main quality and characteristic of icons. The gold does not represent the colour, but symbolizes light and its radiance gives to the icons the feeling of dismissal. Those thoughts of Florenskij was inspired by the Gospel. “All that came to be was alive with his life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never quenched it”: John 1:4-5.

*The gold* as a symbol of purity played an important role in the Byzantine hierarchy. Everything that was perfect and everyone who was perfect were in connection with the characteristic of “gold” - light. For example the imperial documents which signed by the emperor, were verified by the golden seal with the name *chrysobull* (Greek. “golden seal”). The Early Byzantine's codex of laws, found in the Codex Justinianus, had ‘gold’ in its title – Evangelos Chrysos. The church father, St. John, who was a writer of the Orthodox Easter liturgy, got the name “*Chrysostomos*” (Greek: “golden mouth”) – an account of his eloquence.

The dome of the cathedral or churches was compulsory decorated by a gold list outside and with the gold mosaic inside and thus became a symbol, that the church is the incarnation of the Heaven on the earth. The *epitaphios* as a liturgical cloth was used to cover the holy chalice during the preparation of the gifts for the Eucharist service. Probably this was the oldest type of liturgical thread which was decorated by gold - *chrysokentema* (Greek. “the golden embroidery”).

After the Iconoclastic Controversy *the canon of the hierarchy of colours was created*. It was based on the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and also on the teachings of the holy fathers who were based on the orthodox faith. “The Church confessed and confesses now that the holy Fathers are the creators of true icons (Florenskij 2001, 16 [my translation]). They were creators of the iconographic canons where the important role plays the meaning of lightness, light, shadow and colour.

According to this canon, *gold* was thought of as a pure light without admixture and colour, only with a tone. Terminologically ‘gold’ in the theology is *not* a colour. Gold could not be (mixed) together with other colours because only gold gives light and all other colours are reflections of the light. So, the functions of the gold and the colours are opposite to each other. “The gold is the metal of sun and this is the reason why it does not have the colour. This gives the explanation about the “gold sky” on the icons, its remain us about the theological Heaven” (Trubetskoy 1916, 78 [my translation]).

In the icon terminology in the Russian language one still uses a verb which explain lightness as coming from the gold – “*золотится*”, (*zolititsia*). Only an icon has this special quality of light which expresses its “statical actions” and makes it flesh as an Incarnation of God.



In icon painting gold has a meaning which is possible to compare with the understanding of Α and Ω. The icon's background, its technical beginning, was *chrysoplato* (Greek. the "gold panel") and its technical ending was *chrysography* (Greek. the "writing in gold"), since the linear hatching was executed in gold leaf, applied in the last stage of painting. And if it is possible to say something about the reality which gold represents in the context of icons, it is that this reality is just and only light – the formal parallel to gold.

The icon describes the things which were created by light, but does not describe the things which were illuminated by the light. It is important to distinguish between the icons and the West European paintings, as for example the works of Rembrandt, where the light pulls out the parts and details of things from the darkness.

The concept of gold as light opened also the perception that the shadow is a synonym of darkness, which in the theology is the parallel to non-existence – τὸ οὐκ εἶναι. In icons, however, shadows do not exist. In icons also strokes do not exist. The reality of icons was not created inductively. It was made step by step from a lot of details, where each of the strokes has its own quality, colour and life. Technically the icon painting is the opposite to the oil painting.

The classical icons used just open and clean colours without the tone and half-tone. The colours did not run together. Technically this is possible to realize only in tempera. After the Iconoclastic Controversy, egg tempera became the most popular technique and was in use as the only one accepted technique in Greece and then in Russia until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Russian *plav* technique (from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century), which creates fluid colour gradations for flesh tones, also aims for subtlety rather than for a naturalistic or illusionistic presentation.

*All colours had a theological meaning and they were stable in use.* The colours conform to the conventional symbolism and it could be said that each of them had a *consistent meaning*. The Russian medieval manuscripts kept the old names for the most popular colours: ochre, cinnabar, red lake, purple, *golubets* - (*голубец*) blue, and emerald green. On the top of the colour hierarchy was the white colour. On the way from the top to the bottom was a special order of colours, each colours having its distinct meaning.

*The white colour* signified the incarnation, the beginning of new life in qualitative sense, the opposite of death. In the motive of the Transfiguration (Album 33) the clothes of Christ according to the canon were white. The same is the case in the cloth or shroud of Lazarus in the motif the Raising of Lazarus. Stability of the colour canon was a key for recognizing and understanding the icon. It might be any one of the icons named the Transfiguration, dating to the

13<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and connected to the Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, Ukrainian or Russian school, but constantly the cloth of Christ must be white only. The justification for this monotony was in the textual significance of the canon which demanded that each colour must be read without mistake.

*The black colour* is never used as an independent element. It is always used together with the white. Black shows death but not in its finiteness but as a possibility for the incarnation, as a possibility for life in flesh. In the motive the Ascension (Album 13) the black spot of Hell is in contrast with the white cloth. In the motif the Raising of Lazarus, the white cloth of Lazarus is contrasted to his grave. This was the rule for icons when the white and black colours existed in dialogue with each other.

*The blue colour* was the mark of the “heaven of the earth”. Very commonly the angels as mediators have light blue clothes and in their hand hold the blue sphere as a symbol of the incomprehensible faith. In the motif the Apocalypses an angel rolls up the blue scroll-heaven. Most often the martyrs wore a blue cloth, but heaven as background in the icons was never blue.

*The purple* was the colour of the cloth of Christ (after the Incarnation) and the Virgin. Christ in the iconography of the Pantokrator (Album 1; 5) holds in his hand the open Testament. The words in this book are usually purple. In the hierarchy of the Byzantine society only the emperor had a purple cloth, an obvious motivation for giving the purple colour such a high status.

*The red colour* was the colour of the struggling faith. The Archangel Michael (Album 24) was the main angel warrior with the Devil, so his clothes were red. Moses (Album 28) and Elijah often have some part of their clothes in red colour. By the red cloak of St George (Album 31), billowing in the wind, a profound characterisation is achieved – here of St George as a passionate defender of faith, as both martyr and hero.

*The ochre colour* was used for painting faces and hands. In Russian the colour was called – “*lichnoe pismo*”, (Russian: *личное письмо*), which means “the writing of the face”. Practically it was made after painting the background, the landscape, and the figure with the cloth; as the last step the face and hand were made in ochre. After this process only remained the process of *chrysography*. Light was laid over colour.

*The green colour* had the lowest and last place in the colours' hierarchy. It was the most materialistic colour and logically, therefore, placed at the bottom of the icons *pozem* – (Russian for *Earth only for a holy persons*). The ground or the earth, where the holy persons stayed, was all time the warm green. Colours in the icons are not the colours of nature; they depend less on colour perception of the world, than painting from the later periods. In the classical period, from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the icon painters evident harbour a love for pure, bright colours with the compulsory combination of the gold.

The clean colours give the icons the ability to produce an effect even in the half-gloom of a church interior, where there was not enough light from the windows and candles. These colours have body, they are solid, almost weighty and tangible, and somewhat limited in their radiance. But the function of radiation in the icons is played by the warm gold. All together the colours together with gold give an immense power of expression as an impact in the icons..

The technique *plav* opened the possibility for using in icons not only the primary colours, but also the intermediate ones with the varying brilliance and saturation. The colours became a little bit translucent and the gesso ground can be seen through them. Among them were some shades of red and violet of exquisite beauty in themselves, and at time shades which have no name now. But these colours can be caught by man's eye – colours which glow, shine, sparkle, which ring and ring, thus conveying tremendous joy.

The colours of the Golden age of icons have a huge positive energy which are reflected towards us. The colours come from somewhere in the depths of the panel. They begin to burn, to glow after the contact with the gold and they express the inner fire of the spirit, and correspond with the spiritual, intense expression in the faces of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints.

The colour canon disappears in the icon painting of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Now the dark tones started to dominate, at first highly saturated, ringing and noble. Later they were replaced by dull earthy tones, with a considerable proportion of black, and dark green backgrounds appear.

The classical and Golden Age Russian icons, as a last bastion of the traditional Orthodox art, had certain features which made them unable to withstand the impact from outside world. From the West came the new techniques of oil painting, engraving and etching which the icons were not able to adapt.

### 3.3 The place of the icons in the architectural space

*We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth, for surely there is no such splendour or beauty anywhere upon earth. We cannot describe it to you: only this we know, that God dwells there among men, and that their service surpasses the worship of all other places. For we cannot forget that beauty. - Envoys of the Russian Prince Vladimir, after experiencing the Divine Liturgy at the Church of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in the year 987.*

In our days old icons are mostly exhibited on the walls of museums. One thing that should not be forgotten, is that the icons were not originally painted to be displayed in this way. They were supposed to surround people in their daily life, and always the icons were in the place of honour. At home they were standing on the east corner, which in Russia has the name “*krasny ugol*” (красный угол) – the “red” or “beautiful corner”. (In the Soviet time the propaganda of Marx and Lenin was hanged on the wall with the same name - “*krasny ugol*”). But in the medieval period icons were also attached to a pole by the side of the road, to be carried high above the host setting out on a campaign. Of course, the majority of icons were placed inside churches. There they were a necessity for the daily Church service and there they realized their theological and aesthetic functions.

In the beginning of Christianity there were a lot of borrowings from the previous epoch. “There is no way of knowing whether these buildings differed in any way from domestic structures. Architecturally speaking, before the Constantine peace virtually all church buildings that are known were houses or commercial buildings modified for church use” (Ferguson 1999, 74). In contrast to the period of Antiquity, where the main ceremony was outside the temple, Christianity celebrated its worship inside of (homes and) churches. Possibly the first icons were made for such liturgical purpose and they were also part of the decoration of the church interiors. Byzantine worship was surrounded with rich ceremonies and conducted in churches decorated with mosaic or frescoes with Christ and the saints.

...since they (icons) are an integral part of the Orthodox worship, they can be fully understood only in their context. As the worshipper stands surrounded by the icons of Christ, of the Mother of God and of the saints and the events of the history of man's salvation, he is vividly made aware of the reality of both the communion of saint and the loving economy of God (Lash 1983, 275).

Most of the liturgical action took place at the altar which was closed off from the worshipers by the iconostasis (Album 32), the icon screen. Some times, especially during the Easter liturgy,

the celebrants carried around the church the bread and wine which were to be consecrated with the ceremony of icons and choir sang.

...icons create what we might call a resonance or an uplifting in the spiritual sense. They are statements of faith, milestones along path to perfection, images of the invisible comeliness of the Kingdom of Heaven, and open channels leading to it. Their material presence in the context of the Church actuates the concluding prayer of the Divine Liturgy (Damianos 2004, 340).

According to Florenskij: "The first task for the icon painter made by the technique the attitude to the icon that it was not a panel but a wall"(Florenskij 2001, 50 [my translation]). This attitude of seeing a parallel between the the icons and a wall is a conventional symbol, and in it the meaning of stability and durability are expressed. As such it must be in harmony with and work as a united ensemble of all elements which create the atmosphere of the Orthodox liturgy. From this perspective the icons after the Iconoclast period had their background in the frescoes which they were related to in the context of creating the image of churches in general.

Icons in the church first of all reminded the assembled people of the joint activities of the worshipping community. Icons make their appeal not to the individual but to a community of people. Therefore -- now as then -- Icons in a church present and represent their own community. In the theological and antithetical "communication" they got a sound proximity to other icons and profited by their presence.

*In the Orthodox theology an altar has several definitions.* But its most important purpose is to remind people about τόπος νοητός.

Simeon Thessaloniki (10<sup>th</sup> century) notes that the theological approach to altar is the differentiation of two natures of Christ; from the anthropological – the altar is the human soul and the nave is the human body; from the cosmological – the altar is the heaven and the nave is the earth; from the ontological – the altar is an invisible world (Lihachova 1981, 208 [my translation]).

Theologically heaven is separated from the earth. In the Orthodox churches the nave is typically separated from the sanctuary by the altar's fence or wall. It symbolizes the border between a visible and an invisible world and this was (and is) made by the range of icons. Iconologically, the Church is the road to the eternal ascent of mankind. In this content the Church is a reflection of the Ladder - The Ladder of Divine Ascent of Saint John Klimax where was shown not the way but the direction of the road from the visible to the invisible world.

The church and altar without an iconostasis as a real boarder, can be divided by the blind wall. An iconostasis is like a window in a wall. Through this window and its glass we can see by the internal eyesight the eternal and invisible world with the gathering of holy persons who are the alive witnesses of God (Florenskij 2001, 14 [*my translation*]).

This construction of panels of icons started to be a compulsory element of the church at least from the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Later it was developed into the high iconostasis in the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. An iconostasis (Russ. *иконоста́с*) or icon-screen, is a wall of icons with the double doors in the centre. Certain elements of the iconostasis can be perceived from the monumental painting. But if in the observation of frescos the idea of reading its text from the wall was based on the “spherical reading” – from circle to circle and from the dome to the frescos near by the floor, then in the iconostasis dominated the linear reading from top till bottom and from left to right. The system of reading (gradually) changed from volumetric to flatness, and the principles for reading thus became closer to our normal system of reading pages in a book.

Especially the iconographic structure of the iconostasis was close to the motive the Last Judgement, where Christ the Saviour (Album 34; 37) was in the center and the composition in general had a lot of figures. The theological basis of the iconostasis ranges with the iconography of the Deesis (Album 8) in the center, towards whom the saints turn and believe in their ability to intercede for them before the throne of God in their eternal praying for mercy and forgiveness for the sins of mankind. Its literal meaning was the intercession of the saints addressed to Christ.

The central and highest range in an iconostasis is the *Deesis* (which means “entreaty”). In this composition the figures are depicted as a tower and participate in the eternal intercession of saints before the throne of the Most High. The figure of Christ is the centre and on the right side of him stays Mary (from our positions it is the left side) and on the left – Saint John the Baptist. On the side of Mary are the figures of the Archangel Michael (Album 38), the Apostle Peter, St. John Chrysostom. On the side of St. John the Baptist are the figures of the Archangel Gabriel, the Apostle Paul, and St. Basil the Great. Usually the Deesis range has place on the third level of the iconostasis.

On the bottom is the Local range where we find the icons of Christ, Mary and a holy person or holy events to whom or to which the church is dedicated. On the left side of this range is the icon with the Apocalypses. On the second level is the Church Feasts’ range with scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin. In the center of this range is the icon with the iconographic type

the Not Made by Human Hands (Album 6). Up above the Deesis range is located the Apostles range, then the Prophets range and, at the top, the Patriarchs' range.

The iconostasis gradually attained the importance of an assembly of all the saints, of all heavenly and earthly forces, and became a kind of "Church encyclopedia" in which traditional stories gave way to the image of the eternal joyous state of man in eternal glory. The iconostasis gave the possibility of the "dual view". At close range, where all the details are easily observed and where basic and literal meaning is most easily perceived. And, from a distance, where the first meaning seems to retreat and become secondary and another becomes obvious, one that can be perceived only from a distance. This relates to both the content of the image and its formal features. Thereby was conformed once again the symbolic nature of the icon.

When the main point of view is from the distance, then the possibility to recognize the general, universal meaning of the iconostasis theme – eternal prayer of the holy persons for mankind, became more clear. All details go out and the laconic composition together with conventional colouring starts to dominate. The figures of the Deesis range have the solemn silhouettes, they are in slow movements, their postures and inclined head show the action of the eternal prayer.

In the high Russian iconostasis from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the features of icons which had been formed over many centuries, revealed themselves with profound force: clear-cut silhouettes, rhythm and integrity of form and balance of colour alternating regularly and adding to the general colourful fabric.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the iconostasis in the development of the (individual) icons. Many features in the structure of the individual icons can be explained by the fact that at one time they were part of one iconostasis or that they represent an attempt on the part of the painter to recreate a likeness of an iconostasis as a whole in an individual icon. This relates, first of all, to the architectonic of the icons. It also explains the thematic and formal context where the icon is placed within the architectural space of the churches.

A lot of icons, especially from the Local range, have as their main composition the figure of a holy person in the center and around him or her motives from his/her life. To observe clearly the separate borders with small details, to read the painted narrative of the life of the saint, it is necessary to come close to the icon. From a long distance icons were actually seen as an entity in

which the border scenes merged and became a kind of wreath around the figure of the saint. And from this distance icons present its non-figurative decorativeness. From the short distance icons always worked as a figurative composition. Both the mutually exclusive factors co-exist; they are indivisible and present a dialectical unity.

The conclusions for this chapter are: 1). In the Orthodox churches, where the icons are a compulsory element, all the interior space was subordinated to the presentation of the main ideas (or dogmas) of Christianity. Now as then the icons create a thematic, formal (figurative) and colourful (decorative) atmosphere of a liturgy. Icons work as mediators between mankind and holy history and help people to be in prayer. They help us to realize the dream about the “highest beauty” through the light from the Prototype.

2). An iconostasis demonstrates the possibility of collective, joint and mutual prayer, where the holy persons in the iconostasis stay in their eternal prayer to Christ the Saviour (Pantokrator) and people stay in front of it in the temporary prayer. In this action time is concentrated and condensed and gets a liturgical quality. The location of the icons near by the altar shows their significant and important role in the liturgy. The specific language of icons organize the movement of people inside the churches, where they can stay far away from the altar but during the ceremony they might come closer to the altar for the veneration of icons.

3). It was important for the destiny of the icons that even during the Golden Age they were expected to give only what they could give and not to realize hopes that were beyond their power. This means that in general icons were able to combine both the theological and the aesthetic functions as well as representing a lofty and pure art in its finest manifestations. This quality is something primordial and natural. It is these features that cause admiration and envy among contemporaries also from other parts of the Christian church.

4). Icon painting is realistic in an exceptional way. What is depicted in an icon can never be said to be the accepted as reality, or only so in a very narrow sense. The figures of holy persons and forms of objects were transformed in the drawing/writing of icons. Colours were bright and pure, of a kind that cannot be seen as such ‘naturally’ anywhere, such as a truly golden sky. For this reason whatever were written on the icons have an inherent quality of something never seen before, a sense of the unusual and unique. At the same time this hitherto unseen, unusual,



colourful something, as an icon, becomes part of the life of man, becomes part of our sacral and secular spaces, lifts man's spirit and brings a feeling that one has witnessed some miracle.

5). Icon colours come together in harmony, and their forms make up a stable whole, and from this stems the idea that the painter is anonymous and has no need to remind the viewer of himself. The classical icons keep the concept about anonymity. Hence the incomparable power of persuasion of the icon, and its almost inexplicable charm of colour and form. The people in Ancient Russia, beginning with the envoys of Vladimir, who were enchanted with the beauty of St. Sophia in Constantinople, were able to perceive the "highest beauty" which had its origin in Byzantine and which was realized in the Orthodox liturgical art.

## Chapter Four

### THE PAINTERS OF ICONS: METHODS OF WORK AND WAYS OF EXPRESSION

My plans are to discuss the roles of the icon painters in this chapter. They had the special features which was changed during the time; I will analyse the works of two extraordinary artists which biographies remind me of the eternal way of praying.

#### 4.1 The role of the painters in the creation of icons

*How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we describe it?*

*Mark 4:30*

History preserves the most important. Symbolically this can be expressed as the “manuscript does not burn”. However, in the historical reality a lot of information has disappeared. Literally, the “historical data” reveal the ultimate results through the issue of quality. We do have not so many icons from the Golden age of icons, but most of them have a very high level of realization. And only the best of them can be said to be the indirect incarnation of the “highest beauty”.

Luke, according to Church traditions, was the first artist who made the image of Christ and the Virgin. “You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; how is it you cannot interpret this fateful hour?”: Luke 12:56.

In the iconological terminology “appearance” and “appear” are words with key meanings, because they reflect the understanding that the icon has appeared to the Church and the writer of icons as divinely inspired revelation and therefore both reflect God’s glory and convey some of his truth to its readers. We need to keep in mind, that the words “interpretation” and “description” in the later Renaissance period each got a meaning which distinguished it from the other, but in the early Christianity these words were much closer in meaning.

It is, of course, interesting to know – who they were, the medieval icon painters? They were able to open the window into the World of God. They were able to combine theology and art.

But until now the question of their identity is still open, since we have very little information about them.

The authors or writers, as is the most correct way of naming them, were often monks. For these people icon paintings was much more than a profession. It was a style of life with both restrictions and advantages. The monasteries were the centers of culture and knowledge in those days. In the theological sense these artists were not the creators of icons, they were only the mediators of God's ideas. And for this concept their names must be anonymous to history. In those days to be anonymous and to realize their mission as mediators were the biggest advantage of these artists.

According to the medieval perception of the World, the high status of mediators was just stressed by their anonymity. To be anonymous in the service of God was an honour. The icon painter was not responsible for the creation of one separate icon, but he was responsible to God in his service to him through the realization of the icons (Buslaev 1913, 32 [my translation]).

In the medieval culture where the Universe was the place of God and Heaven was the place to which the saints departed, The communication from "inside" to "outside", from microcosmos to macrocosmos and vice-versa was realized by the form and meanings of icons. For the medieval Orthodox person icons therefore represented a window in the general theological sense – a window into the divine realm.

The creators of the window for communicating with God were all Fathers of the Church, who realized the idea about the Heavenly Ladder. According to the traditional hierarchy in the society it was impossible for the artist to put his signature on the panel, since he was not the real author of the icon. He was not able to put himself at the communicative level as an "I" to "God". This must be understood on the background of the Orthodox tradition which recognizes the communication level as being between "We" or "us" and "God". "We" in this context meant therefore expressed the idea that the real creators of icons were the Fathers of the Church and that all icons which were established as *appeared* icons. The writers or painters were only copying them over and over again, many times. The authority to define an icon as an "establishment (διάταξις) icon" therefore rested with the Church, and not with them.

The icons were made not by design and intention (ἐφεύρεσις) but they were made according the Will of God and Tradition (Θεσμοθεσία και Παραδοσις). The Fathers of

the Church were responsible of the composition (διάταξις) and the icon painters – of the technique (τέχνη) (Florenskij 2001, 22 [my translation]).

In the Gospel according to John it is written that, “No one has ever seen God; but God's only Son, he who is nearest to the Father's heart, he has made him known”(John 1:18). In the icon painting tradition this text has been one of the strongest motivations for *not* trying to depict the Divine himself – or the Trinity. But, since the Son has made the Father known, the Church readily accepted icons of Christ and his witnesses. In this context the Fathers of the Church were the *conceptual creators*, but the icon painters were responsible for the general realization of the content of the ideas in visible forms. Probably some of the Church Fathers and Saints were icon painters, as this was suggested from the history about Luke. The Orthodox tradition keeps a long list of Saints whose names were connected to the idea of the creation of icons.

Theology and aesthetics, theory and practice find their realization in the icon painting wherein one indirectly could find a distinction between the “spirit” and the “body”. Indirectly, yes, since in the icons everything is indirect: He (the icon painter) has made him (God) known through the icon. “The icon painter knew no contradiction between conception and execution” (Alpatov 1974, 17).

In the medieval period the service and preaching of the Word of God was the privilege of the priests and the church authorities. The image of God came much closer to the community, linked to the daily life of ordinary people. If not every day, but often they were in the churches and during the liturgies people were in visible contact with the Prototype, and got his light through the icons. In this sense the icons were their environment and were their encyclopedia. The writers of this encyclopaedia remained in the shadow of the glory of God. They did not have special marks of honour in society, but had the response from it. This response was definitely expressed by the common title for the icon painters in Old Russia - “humble employees of God” (Pokrovskij 2000, 236 [my translation]).

The meaning of icons, if one does not recognize them as light from the Prototype, is not more than a colourful instruction of the Bible. Icon painters reminded us about the prayer as a way. And this way goes from the image to the Prototype – of Him whom we worship (Florenskij 2001, 18 [my translation]).

The creative action of producing icons had a special characteristic. It existed in the traditions and it was customary to obey these. The iconographical canons reflected the collective will and ideals of many generations, and these were handed down from one generation to the next. Canon

types served as a point of departure. The artistry lay in their interpretation. Each artist told the Biblical story according to the general concept and also added to it a little bit from himself. “He (anonymous icon painter) embroidering the canvas with patterns of his own invention” (Alpatov 1973, 8). The painters kept the canons but they made small deviations which gave variety to the common themes and gave them new interpretation. The art of the icon painter consists in a great degree of his creativity with nuances. On the other hand we can recognize the common elements in icon paintings, the features linking the various centuries and schools and enabling one to mentally classify each item under the blanket heading “Classical Icon Painting”.

The icon paintings from the classical period which have survived to our days in fact show that only people with a rich inner life and considerable intellect could create them. These were people with a selfless devotion to their convictions, with no doubts about what they were doing, and certainly not in the least indifferent to what they were producing.

The necessary action before and in the process of the practical creation of the icons was *prayer*. The prayers were included in the compulsory description of the process of making icons. Many of the icons manuscripts with iconographical schemes started off with the texts of these prayers. Literally the prolonged prayers of the artists had their own continuation in the description of the eternal prayer which the Saints in the icons offer to Christ.

The fasting, prayer and meekness prepared and purified the body of the icon painter and turned his soul to the situation when he could receive the melody as a signal from above (Trubetskoy 1916, 12 [my translation]).

The Moscow synod of 1551 (Stoglav – “hundred heads”) decreed that the icon painter should be “meek, pious, not given to idle talk or to laughter, not quarrelsome or envious, not a thief or a murderer” (Pokrovskij 2000, 235 [my translation]). This is the testimony of what was expected and demanded of the icon painter by the church authority and by his contemporaries. This is also regarded as a characteristic of what the icon painters in reality were. And they were considered people of high moral ideals.

We suggest, that in a big degree this decision of the synod reflected the position and attitude to the artist which was common in the Golden age of the icons. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was the habit of the Church Authority to remind the icon painters of this, so that they might behave and conduct their work according to the tradition. This also is a proof that in society in general, and

among the society of painters, there had developed a new tendency with which the church was not satisfied.

Also the dogmatic debates over new icons and the affirmation by the Stoglav synod to control the icon painters put an end to the pious fervour of the painters and at the same time to the heyday of the icon painting. The Synod upheld Rublev (see 4.2) as an example to be followed, but in fact it severed the precious thread which had extended through Russian art since his time.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> centuries painters imitated old models as a demand from the authorities and repeated traditional iconographical types. But it was not more than imitation and copying. In that time the icons were not so much created by painters as produced by craftsmen. The icons became a product or merchandise for selling and buying. The market did not demand high quality, but its demand was a big amount of icons. Under this pressure the icon painting as a whole, began increasingly to lose its character as a great art and it became more didactic, narrative and illustrative. The consumers pushed icons to its ending as a holy art.

After the development of the consumers' market of icons in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the works of bad icon painters began to appear and aroused the anxiety of the Church authorities. In this period was developed the definition of icon painters which was remarkable for the Stoglav synod. Probably, for the first time in the Church's history came by the decision of the synod the definition of who were to be considered as "good icon painters" and "bad icon painters", with further differentiation found within the definitions "good" and "bad". Most of the new names applied to the bad painters – bogomazu (*богомазу*), ikonniki (*иконники*), plokhopistsy (*плохопистцы*). Among them was a hazard to the classical icons because the Church Authority was so occupied by them.

The time changed the role and positions of the icon painters. During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries their role was more that of a profession. The sacramental element in the action of icon painters was lost and their important role in society began to rapidly decrease.

Everything in history has periods of ascent and decline. Usually, the main conclusion is possible to make according to the highest point of the event. The highest point of icon painting was its Golden age of the 10<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this period the icon painters did not show their own ambitions and did not make careers. Rather they tried to understand and reflect their

understanding which they expressed in the “objective beauty” and the “truth of things” in the icons they painted, and which they and the Church considered to be the “highest beauty”.

#### **4.2 Theophanes the Greek and Andrei Rublev: biographies as prayers**

*... but think your way to a sober estimate based on the measure of faith that God has dealt to each of you.*

*Romans 12:3-4*

History has preserved very few names of icon-artists. The tradition was for icon painters to keep anonymity. But time and again history has made exceptions. I think that these exceptions were not made accidentally. Some of the painters became more than mediators whose names were told as legends from generation to generation.

For the authors or writers of icons, whose names we know, there exist no “normal biographies” in our meaning. Their dates of birth and death are unknown, and also the places where they were buried are unknown. We know them and their lives thanks to their extraordinary activities and creativity and their biographies exist in the history as a prayer.

The features of the Russian icon painting can be explained in its Byzantine origin. The first icons were brought to the Old Rus from Constantinople, and the first icon masters who worked in the country were Greek. At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century came a new wave of Byzantine influences, this time in the epoch of the Paleologues, spread throughout Rus. Its most prominent representative was the great master Theophanes the Greek (c. 1330s-1415). His art – passionate, dramatic, wise, austere, at times tragically intense and frequently lofty – had a big impact on the Russian painters.

A famous sage, a wise philosopher, a master who excelled in decoration of manuscripts and the best of icon-painters”, such were the words of the educated monk Epiphany the Wise about his contemporary Theophanes the Greek”. This monk continued: “When he painted, no one even saw him following standard patterns – unlike some of our icon-painters, who spent more time perplexedly studying models than painting. He paint[ed?]s with his hands, but constantly [was?]is on the move, chatting with callers, cogitating things wise and elevated, and seeing goodness with eyes of reason ( Pokrovskij 2000, 124 [my translation]).

Theophanes was born in Byzantium in the thirties of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. When he came to Russia he was between 35 and 40 years old and had already decorated more than ten stone

churches in Constantinople and other places of Byzantine. His extremely distinctive art was based on the hesychastic influence which came from Athos and had a big influence in the North of Russia. And the first work which Theophanes accomplished in Russia was the fresco painting in Novgorod church which he dedicated to Our Saviour (1374-1378). Probably, this is the only icon which was connected to Theophanes in his Novgorod period which has been preserved. . This is the icon with the Transfiguration (Album 33). Into the traditional scene he brought a lot of what was typical “from Greek”. His powerful figures are full of intense dramatic emotions.

From 1395 to 1405 his name was mentioned in the old manuscripts, a time when he worked in Moscow. According to chronicles Theophanes had his own studio and carried out commissions with the help of his pupils. From all his work in Moscow still exists the iconostasis in the Cathedral of Annunciation in Kreml, which Theophanes painted together with Andrei Rublev and the monk Prokhor from Gorodets.

In this collaboration Theophanes worked with the central Deesis range. His icons are: The Saviour (Album 34), The Virgin, John the Baptist, The Archangel Gabriel, The Apostel Paul, John Chrysostomos and Basil the Great. In the center is the stern judge – the Saviour, seated on the throne; on either side are saints, interceding with Christ for a sinful mankind. As before, Theophanes' saints are powerful and individualized. But here there are also new qualities: they are more restrained and majestic. There is more warmth in the image of the Virgin, more gentleness in that of the Archangel Gabriel and more tranquility in the wise apostle Paul.

These icons are exceptionally monumental in character. In them Theophanes retains the general style of his frescos. But here the lines are more simple, distinct and restrained. Theophanes' icons really give the impression that the icon is a wall, and that this wall in the theological sense have several meanings.

The figures in them are clearly silhouetted against a brilliant gold background and the colours of their clothes are vibrant. Theophanes appeared as the master of low-brilliance saturated hues, using cherry, red, dark blue, dark green and brown. He had a superb mastery of the interplay of complementary colours and of illumination; light falls on bodies cloaked in darkness, like the heavenly bliss on the sinful earth. In his icon of the Dormition of the Virgin from the Donskoj Monastery (Album 35) the red cherub burns bright as a candle on the bier.



The task of decorating the Cathedral of the Annunciation brought together two great masters of medieval Rus, who each in his own way gave expression to a period full of dramatic conflicts: the old Theophanes brought forward the Greek in tragic, titanic images; the quiet young Rublev painted harmonious, serene images, expressing thereby a dream of perfection.

In the history of Russian icons painting the name of Andrei Rublev (ca. 1370-1430) stays as a symbol of its highest achievements. As a youth he became a monk and spent many years in the Trinity-Saint Sergii Monastery. Here Rublev received education and moral training, and also learned the art of icon-painting.

For the Cathedral of the Annunciation Andrei Rublev painted several of the festival icons – the Annunciation, the Baptism, and the Nativity of Christ, the Transfiguration, the Raising of Lazarus and the Entry into Jerusalem. They are distinguished from Theophanes' works by their gentility and harmony. The scenes from the Gospels are depicted with great intimacy, spirituality and human warmth. The colours are marked by tremendous emotionality and refined beautifully with a damp down light.

The very fact that Rublev was an extraordinary talented artist is evident from the fact that he, the monk from outside of Moscow, was able to get a job together with Theophanes whose name was already legendary.

In 1918 three icons from the Deesis range were found in the Zvenogorod – the Saviour (Album 37), the Archangel Michael (Album 38) and the Apostle Paul. Among scientists the dominating position held is, that they were made by Rublev between 1410-1420. The Zvenigorod Saviour is especially remarkable. The face of Christ is distinctive and spiritual, with delicate, austere features. He is full of mental concentration and his gaze is direct and penetrating, expressing human kindness. The image of the Apostle Paul is suffused with humanity and calm wisdom, while that of the Archangel Michael is lyrical and full of profound poetic charm.

The real glory of Andrei Rublev is connected to the icon with the Old Testament Trinity (ca. 1420) (Album 36). This icon is deservedly the best-known work of Russian icon painting. Rublev's painting displays in the purest form the finer points of early Russian icon painting: philosophical profundity, the religious basis, the symbolic character of images, the skill and meaningfulness of form, composition, rhythm and colour.

The significance of this icon is not limited only by the Orthodox form of answer to the question of the nature of the Old Testament Trinity, over which the heated controversy raged between the official Church and heretics. The dogma had been laid down by the Church Fathers. Rublev used the traditional iconography in the Hospitality of Abraham, but he took away from that scheme the figures of Sarah and Abraham and concentrated all his attention on the three angels.

The iconographical problem with respect to the Trinity was expressed by each of the three figures and masterly solved by Rublev. Apparently Rublev's aim was not to show the difference between them but on the contrary to demonstrate their spiritual unity and indivisibility – a point which none of his predecessors was able to achieve to such a degree.

Probably, the reason for changing the stable iconography had a historical background.

Rublev painted his celebrated Trinity in memory of Sergii Radonezhsky, one of the inspiring minds behind the Battle of Kulikovo, who did much to help stopping the civil war and unite the Russian princes in the struggle against the Tatars (Dmitrieva 1969, 178 [my translation]).

On the Trinity of Rublev are the three enchantingly beautiful figures seated for a meal round a table on which is a bowl. This bowl is the theological and compositional center of the icon. In this symposium each figure is wonderful and spiritual in its own way; the slim hands are beautiful; the inclined circle heads, the expression of love and mutual understanding on the angel's faces.

The totality is a harmonious, integral whole, the similitude of a wreath, set within a circle, it acquires the rhythmic form of musical refrain. In this visual form the divines have the a highest meaning – the logic of the universe, which seems the highest wisdom: the three in one – the prototype, the model of the world (Klevaev 2007, 54 [my translation]).

For this icon Rublev employed the well-known meaning of symbols of the object: the wing to denote flight, the bowl as a symbol of sacrificing, the mountain as a spiritual ascension, the tree as the Tree of Life and architectural details as a home in the Biblical sense. It is important that none of the details are like abstract allegories requiring a key to their understanding. They make up something integral, they are seen in such juxtaposition and inter-relation as to be part of a pictorial fabric in such a way that one's mind derives a special pleasure in the very contemplation of it all, realising that here is expressed an ascent from the particular to the general, to something that is significant to all mankind.

The predominance of cold colours, of blue, violet and emerald green in the icons of Rublev and the painters of his school, gives them a character of lofty spirituality. Each of his icons has a gold glow which is heightening the impression of harmony.

Everything what we know about those two talented artists are mostly expressed in the latest notes in the medieval manuscripts and also in the legends which surrounded them. They have in our memory only a “pointing biography” where the events of life are represented only by some remarkable stars – those stars were their icons. These icons, of course, do not have any signatures, they are anonymous, as the whole lot of the classical icons. But those stars were so bright that they entered into the history of art, and more generally, in the human history. We have a Russian saying: “If stars start to shine on the sky this means that someone needs them”.

Two of those artists lived around six hundred years ago. Both of them were able to express profound human and philosophical ideas. Their icons had a big influence on their contemporaries and still appeal to the modern man because of their noble emotions, delicate poetry and inspired beauty. The icons of Theophanes the Greek and Andrei Rublev are much more than the theology in the images, they are able to give the highest aesthetic feelings also for people who are not connected to Orthodox history. Their icons appeal to everyone and their messages do not have the limitation of time – are not in that sense “dated”. Thereby they represent general values of mankind. They are the best proof that, phenomenologically speaking, the icons are cultural, spiritual, aesthetic and scientific representations (see 2).

Everything, what we know at the biographies of Theophanes the Greek and Andrei Rublev, have an approximate characteristic. The words “may be” and “probably” are most convenient to illustrate their creative heritages. But we know for sure that they lived in the prayers and created in the prayers. The prayers were the main detail in their environment. All their icons reflect to us the prayers from the old days. We are involved directly or indirectly in the dialog with those icons. The highest message of icons continues in the realization of the idea about the eternal way of praying.

To the reader of icons, therefore, the following invitation goes out: “Just look, and you will see the “highest beauty”, just listen, and the melody of harmony from above will enter your soul.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

For the realization of my topic I made use of theological, aesthetic, scientific, iconographic and biographical approaches. Each of these approaches opened one perspective of the icons, a perspective whose nature supposedly communicated with the readers at the levels of historical and / or existential readings. The icons are always open to their readers. Also they are able to give those messages which the readers are able to receive at the different levels. And the level of perception of the signals from icons therefore depends on the readers' knowledge, intelligence, emotions or faith.

The rather comprehensive analysis which I have made with regard to some representative icons from the Classical period of icon painting makes it possible to draw several conclusions.

“Icon is a gift to mankind and it represents their dreams” (Florenskij 2001, 22 [my translation]). In this context the icons combine three communicative forms, that is the direct, the indirect and the mediated forms of communication. I have not dealt much with the direct form, that is the communication of the pre-text, which is found in the biblical and other traditional narrative texts of the church. Yet I have pointed to it when I dealt with the themes of and canons for icon paintings (see 3.1; 3.2).

For the icon painter and the informed reader this pre-text exists as a wider framework for reading the icon itself. In the indirect form of communication the icon painter brings the reader into contact with aspects or themes of the pre-text (see 3.3). And, in the mediated form of communication the reader of the icon is brought into contact with the icon painter's own dialogue with the person(s) or narrative(s) that is (/are) represented in the icon (see 4.1; 4.2). These forms of communication make it possible to penetrate deeply into the content of the icons and leave us with a wide room for reading and understanding them. This is the most important principle when entering the world of icons, a world within which there exist many questions to be discussed and answered. But at the basis of the world of icons there is no place for contradiction. Because the icons are dumb yet communicating witnesses of God. Their aim is to bring about harmony and peacefulness.

Aggression, ignorance, incomprehension and indifference – these attitudes or actions are only to be found among the human readers of the icons – not in the icons themselves. And, as we have seen, such negative attitudes or actions are found several times in the old as well as modern history. This means that the more informed the reader is about the pre-text, the text and the mediated text, the fuller his or her reading may be. But he and she may also be able to grasp *some* meaning when reading the icon if they are informed about one or two of its forms of communication. They may *either* attain a combined existential and historical reading of it *or* merely a historical reading – both levels being present in the icon itself.

When seen from the contemporary historical perspective the nature of icon painting cannot be reduced to only one, simple characteristic feature – either to the cult purpose of the icon, to its style, to the world outlook it may reflect, or to the technique of execution, which continued even when classical icon painting was dying out. Instead the nature of icons – and therefore of icon painting as an art – must be understood as comprising all of these characteristic features (see 2.2; 2.3; 2.4). The ethical and aesthetic characteristics of the medieval icons found their expression in formal features – above all in the light. The forms and colours employed in an icon are of great spiritual force (see 3.1; 3.2). On the other hand, the religious and philosophical ideas of icon painting were impossible to express in any other way than in the special style which is found in icon painting. All these features have determined the structural characteristics of icon painting, which distinguishes it from the painting of the Renaissance and post-Renaissance periods, from Gothic stained-glass windows, from ancient Greek vase painting and Persian miniatures.

The profound humanity of icon painting is connected with the idea of its proportionality with man's knowledge, feelings and emotions, and has come through the cleansing fire of the sensitive human soul; everything is coloured with human sympathy. There is one precious characteristic feature of icons which can be summed up in Gogol's words: "They have no inordinate rapturousness or exaltation, but are dominated by a calm force... It is an unusual lyricism born of a supreme sobriety of mind" (Gogol 2003, 398 [my translation]). Icons are imbued with a profound conviction, a pure faith, but this never develops into a fanatical passion and does not lead to loss of a sense of proportion (see 2.1).

The Life of St Sergius tells of how he built the Trinity Cathedral "that he might vanquish the fear of the hateful strife existing in this world by contemplation of the Holy Trinity" (Alpatov

1973, 10). These words apply not only to the famous Rublev icon the Old Testament Trinity but to icon painting in its entirety. The most wonderful icons do not bring only ideas about their veneration or convey only expectations of aid and healing, but present themselves to man in such a way that, as he looks or looked at them and their beauty, he or she could find solace, joy and concord with the world.

The icons live as texts and can be read. It is possible to compare their reading with our ability to read the book. The child hears the melody of words. The adult knows the rules and makes a critical analysis of the text. The old person understands the symbols of the language and reads the book through his or her own experience of life. Each of these methods is not better than the others, since each brings out different values in the text. We find the same parallel in the ways icons are read. One may approach them at different levels of reading but neither of these can be regarded as right or wrong. Rather one must understand them as mutually supplementing readings.

The icons live in the context. Phenomenologically the icon exists in its unity with the church, as an expression of theological thoughts and architectural space; they address mankind and each person and their modernity. The church created the language of the icons; the icon painters realized the ideas and aimed at harmony as the “highest beauty” in the icons, so that these might – in turn – open the possibility for a visual contact with the World of God . The icons bring phenomena from God’s eternal World through human definitions expressed in “historical time” (see 2.3). Obviously, the reading of them is a “historical reading” but their messages are, however, not dated but are still actual and contemporary and can be caught by the reader through the “existential reading”.

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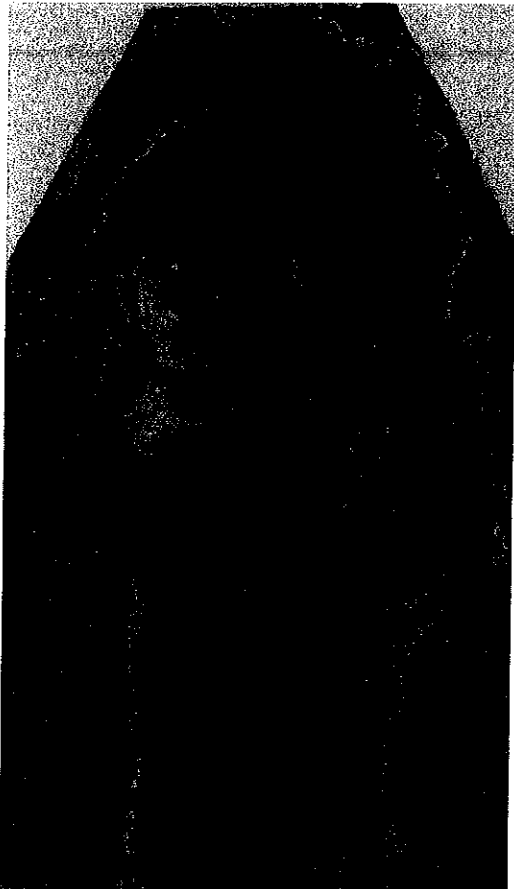
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## AN ALBUM OF ICONS: ATTACHMENT



1. Icon with Christ Pantokrator. Byzantine, 6<sup>th</sup> century. Encaustic on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.



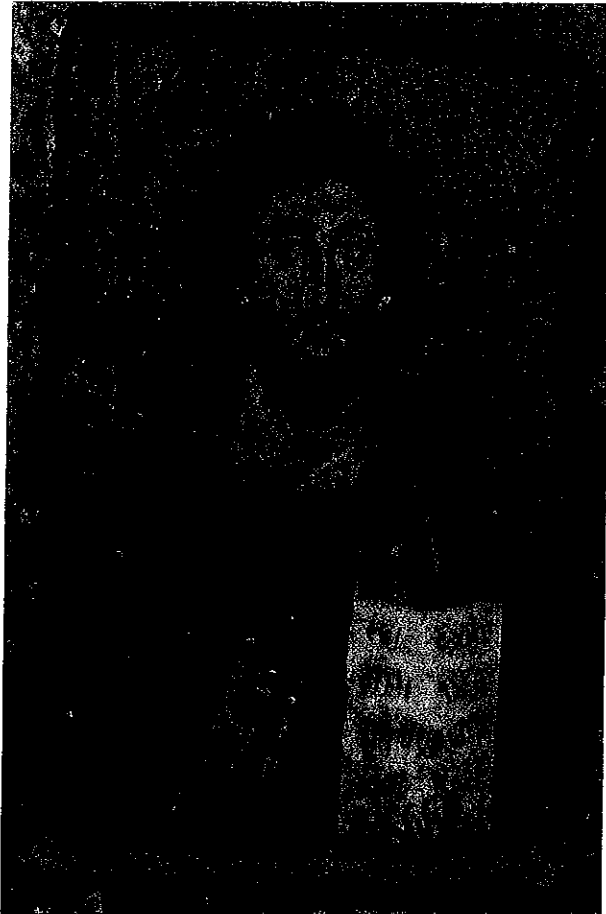
2. Icon with the Virgin Mary with child Christ. Byzantine, 6<sup>th</sup> century. Encaustic on wood. Museum of West and East Art in Kiev. Ukraine.



3. Icon with Sergios and Vach.  
Byzantine, 6<sup>th</sup> century. Encaustic on  
wood. Museum of West and East Art in  
Kiev. Ukraine.



4. Baptistery of the Arians. Cupola.  
Christening of the Christ. 6<sup>th</sup> century.  
Mosaic. Ravenna, Italia.



5. Icon with the Christ Pantokrator. Byzantine, 13<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera and gold on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.

6. Icon with the Christ (Not Made by Human Hands). Veliky Ustug, 1447. Tempera on wood. State Tret'akov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.

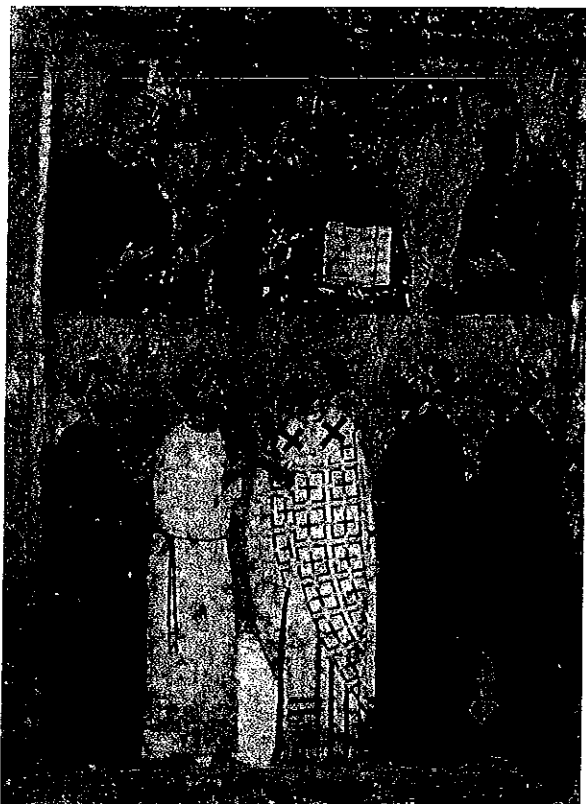




7. Icon with Christ King of Glory (Man of Sorrows). Balkans, 14<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera and gold on wood. State Tre'takov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

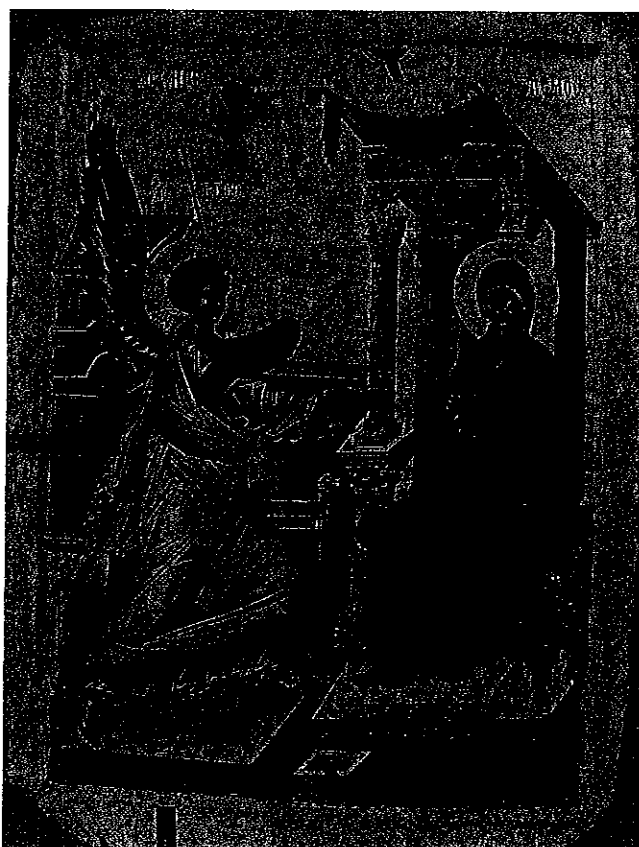


8. Icon with the Deesis. Crusader, ca. 1280s. Tempera and gold on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.

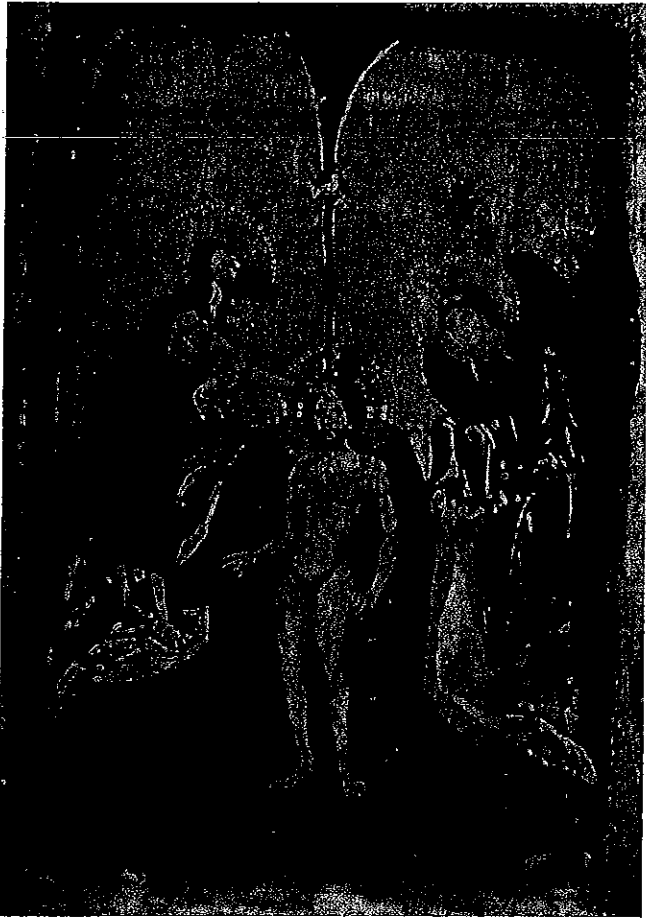


9. Icon with the Deesis and Five Saints. Crusader, late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera and gold on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.

10. The Annunciation. Byzantine (Constantinople), early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood. Icon Gallery, Ohrid, Macedonia.

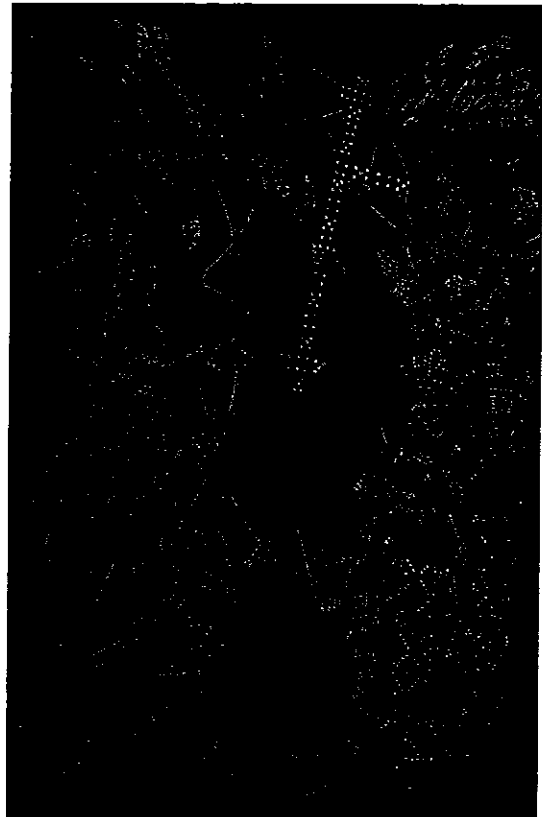






11. Icon with the Baptism of Christ. Crusader, third quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera and gold on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.

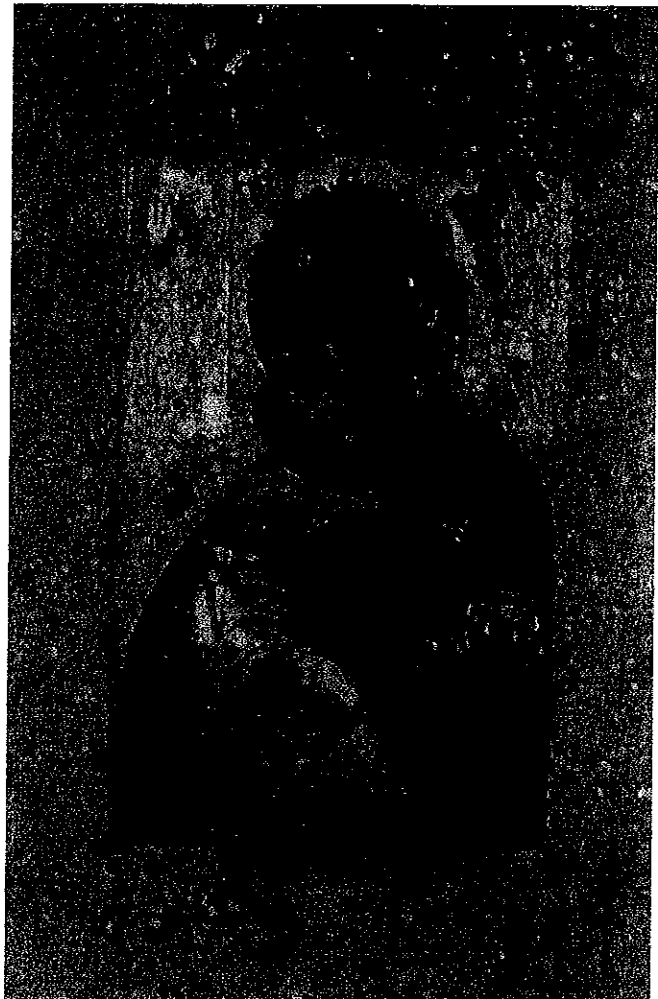
12. Icon with the Anastasis (Resurrection). Crusader, ca. 1280s. Tempera and gold on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.





13. Icon with the Ascension.  
Moscow, first quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup>  
century. Tempera on wood. State  
Tret'akov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.

14. The Virgin of Vladimir. Byzantine,  
11<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood. State  
Tret'akov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.

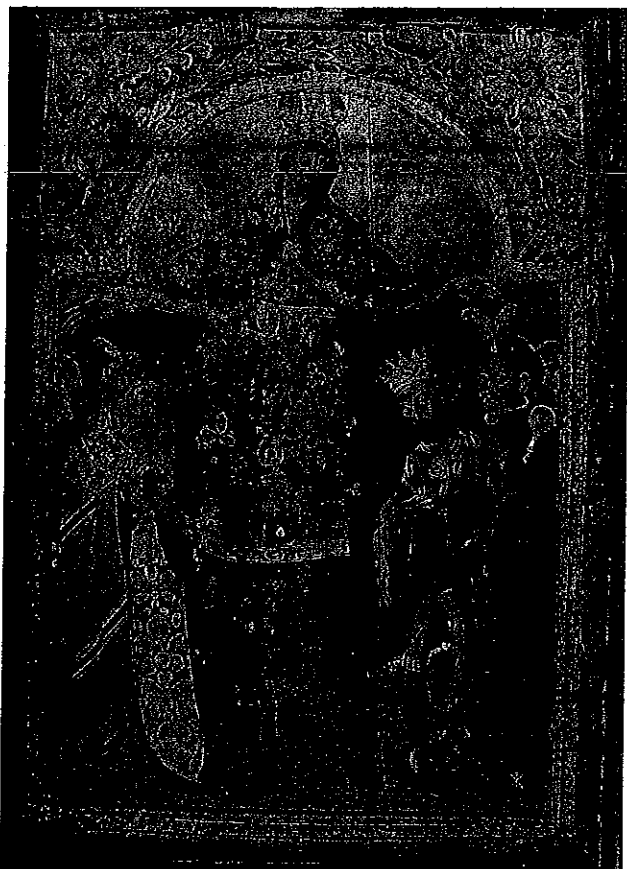




15. Icon with the Virgin Hodegetria. Byzantine, last quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood with relief ornaments in gesso. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.



16. Icon with the Enthroned Virgin and Child. Byzantine, late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.



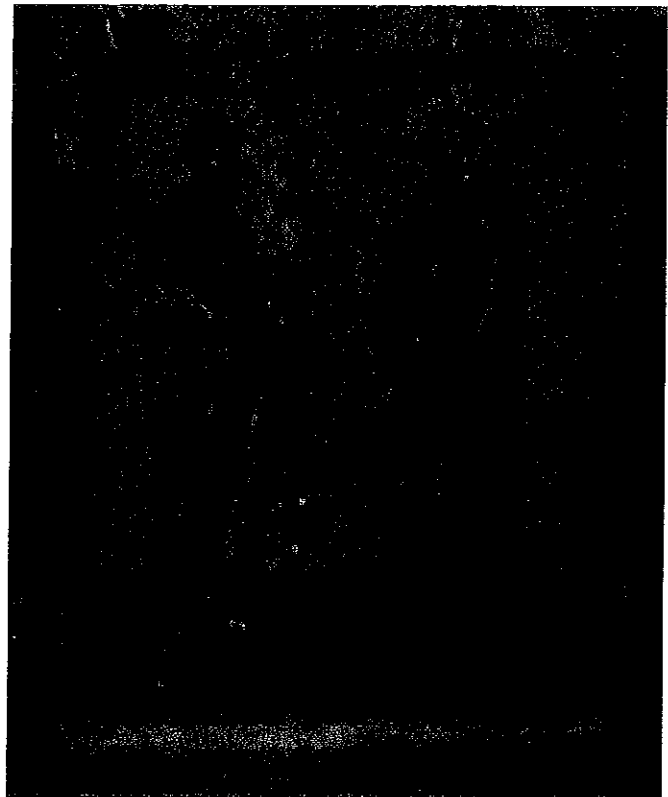
17. Icon with the Shroud. First half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Oil on panel. National Museum of Ukraine Art. Kiev, Ukraine.



18. Icon with In Thee Rejoicing. Moscow. Tempera on wood. State Tret'akov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.



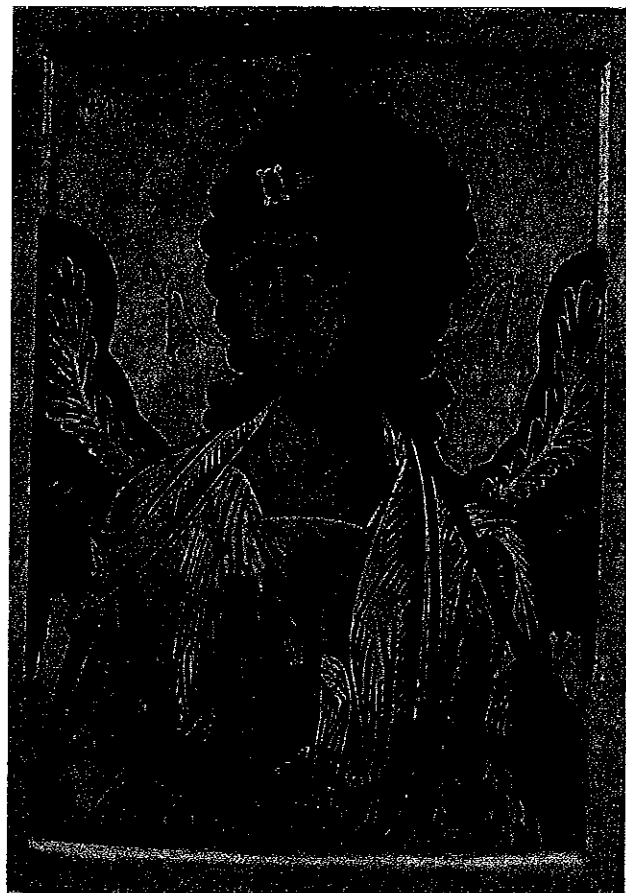
19. Duccio di Buoninsegna. Rucellai Madonna. Italy, 1285s. Tempera and gold on wood. Uffizi, Florence, Italy.



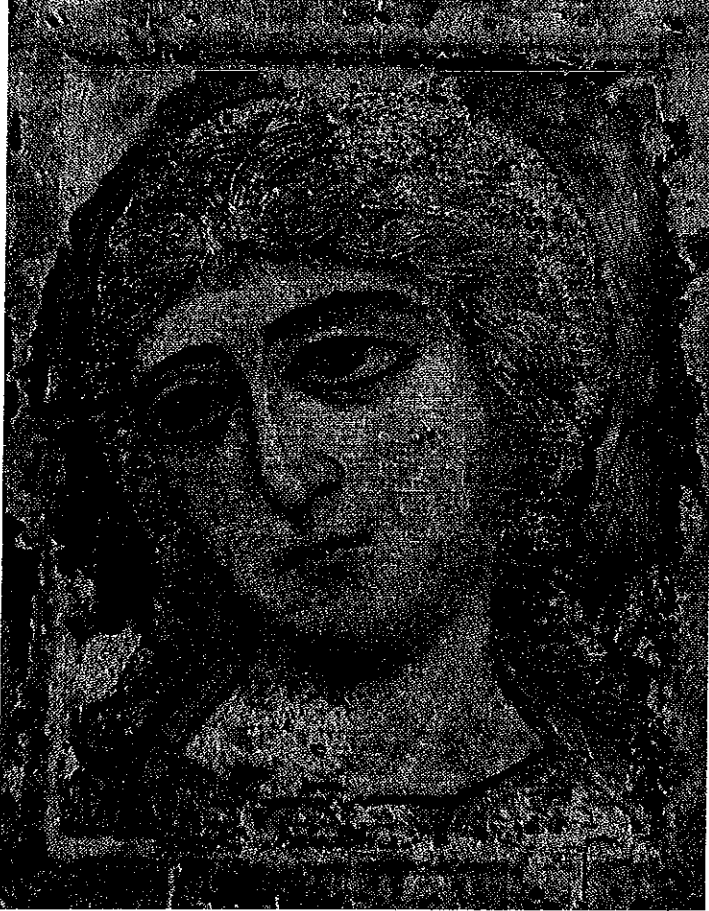
20. Icon with Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Sinai. mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.



21. Icon with the Synaxis of the Apostles. Byzantine (Constantinople), first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood. State Pushkin Museum of Fine Art, Moscow, Russia.



22. Icon with the Archangel Gabriel. Byzantine (Constantinople), 13<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera and gold on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.



23. Icon with the Archangel Gabriel (Angel with the Golden Hair). The Novgorod school, ca 1130-1190s. Tempera on wood. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

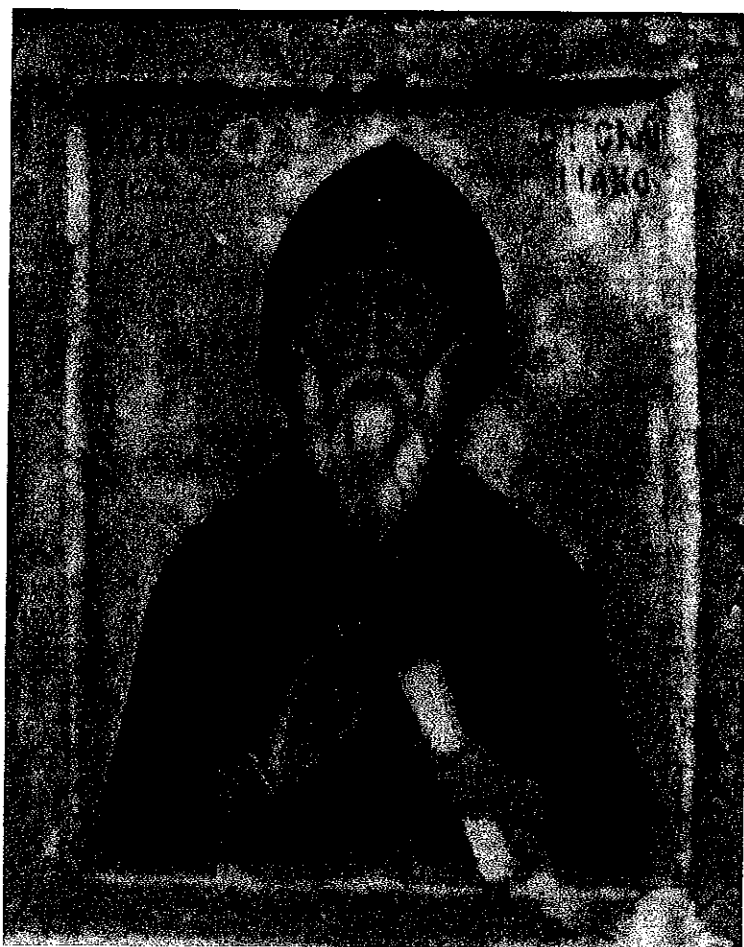


24. Icon with the Archangel Michael. Byzantine, late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera and goul on gessoed wood. Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa, Italy.



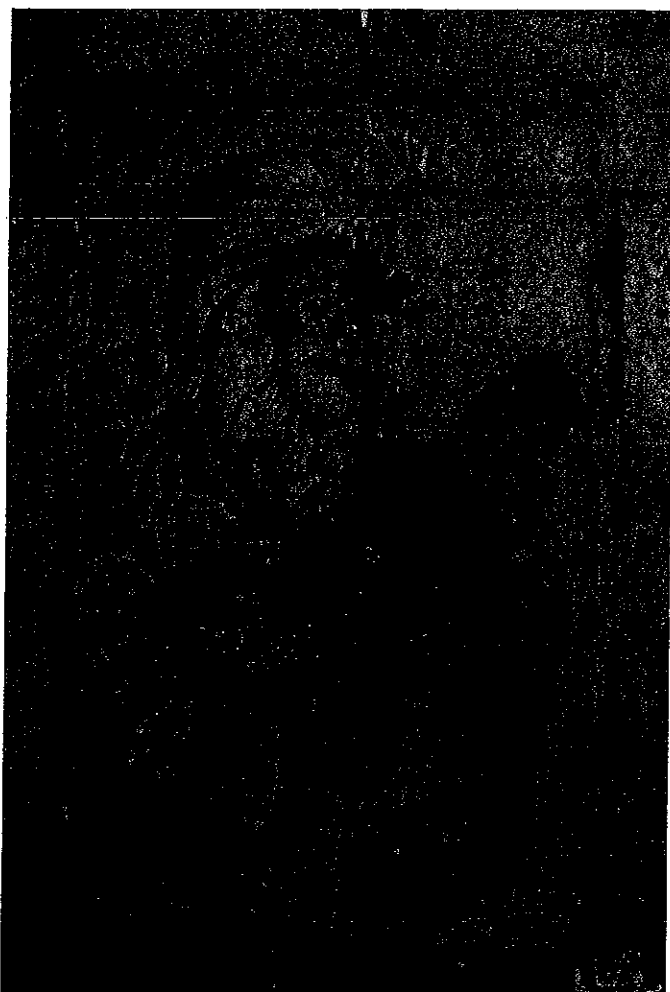
25. Icon with the Heavenly Ladder of Saint John Klimax. Late 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Tempera and gold on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.

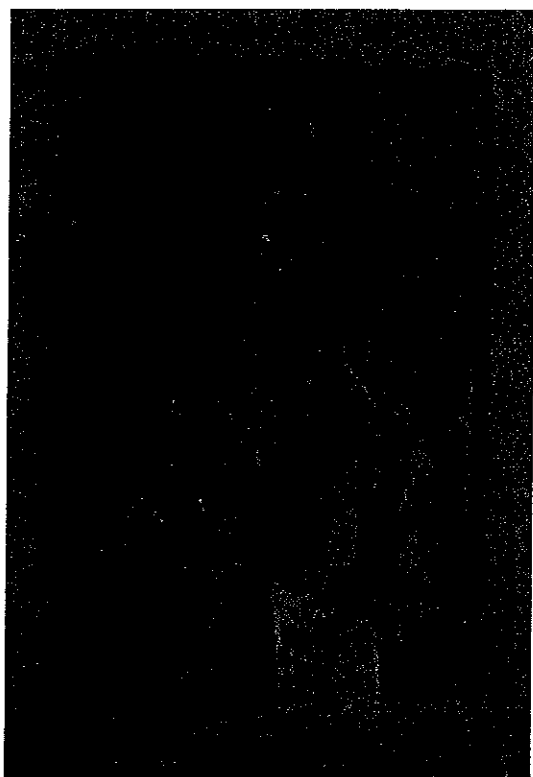


26. Icon with Saint John Klimax. Sinai, 15<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.

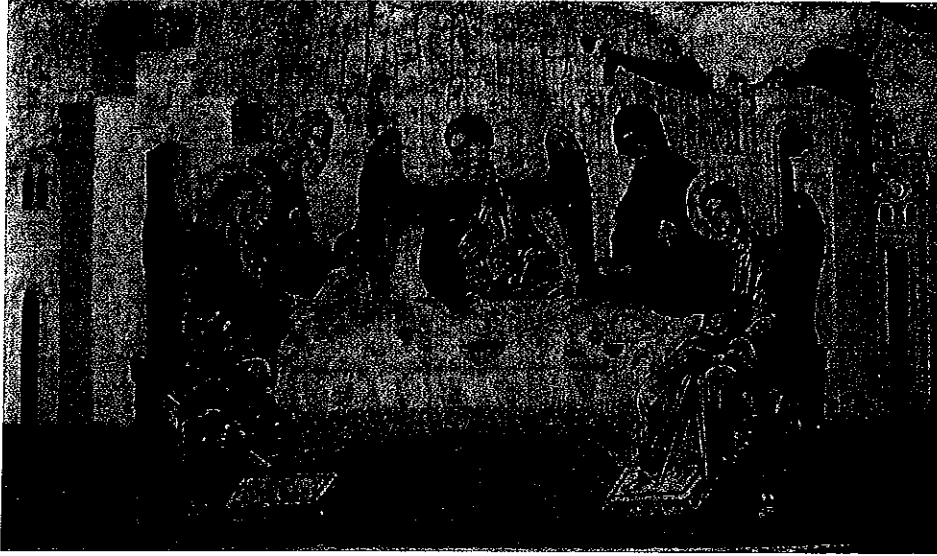




27. Icon with Saint Symeon Theodochos. Byzantine, late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera and gold on wood. Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.

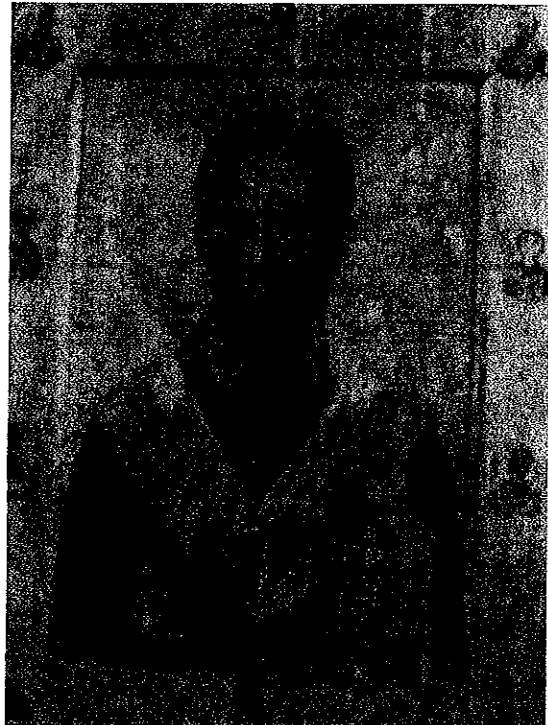


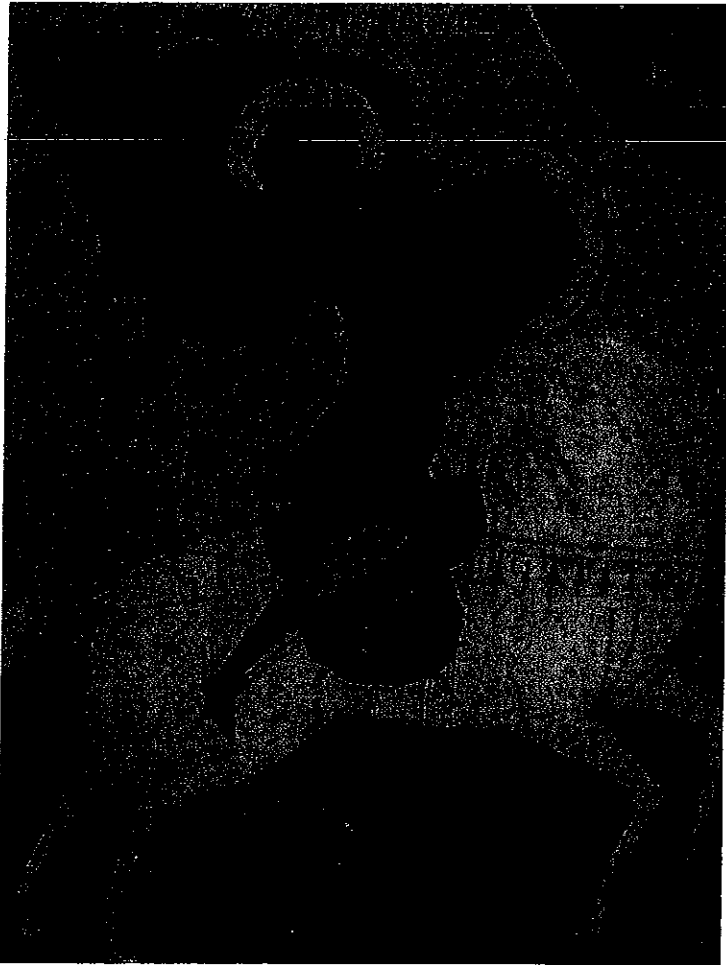
28. Icon with Moses. Sinai, third quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera and gold on wood. Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.



29. Icon with the Hospitality of Abraham. Byzantine (Constantinople), late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood. Benaki Museum, Athens, Greece.

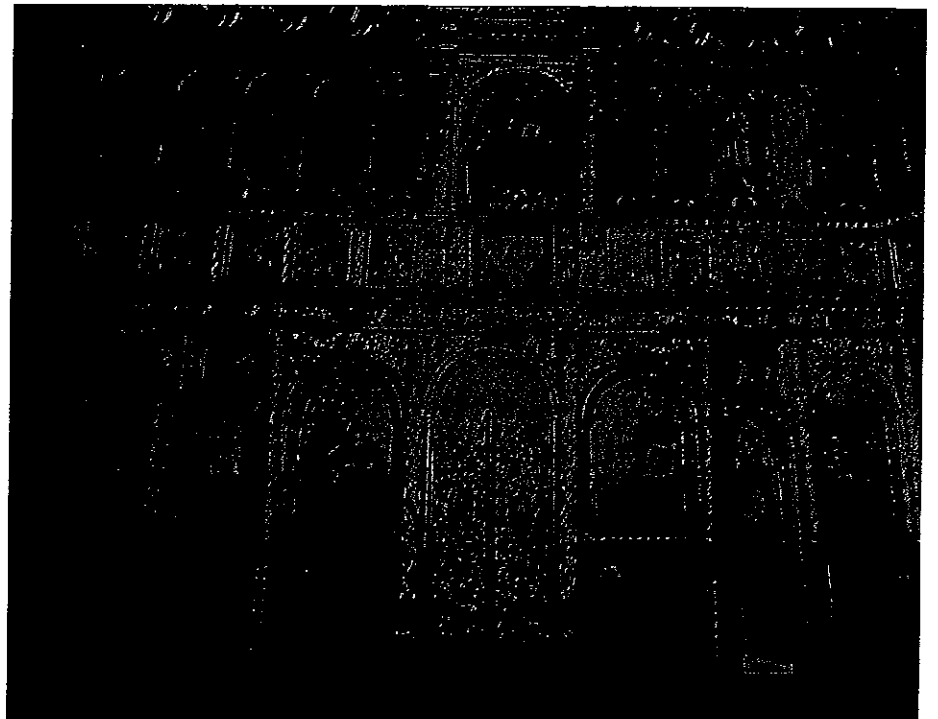
30. Icon of Saint Nicholas. Byzantine, late 10<sup>th</sup> – early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tempera and gold on wood. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai Egypt.

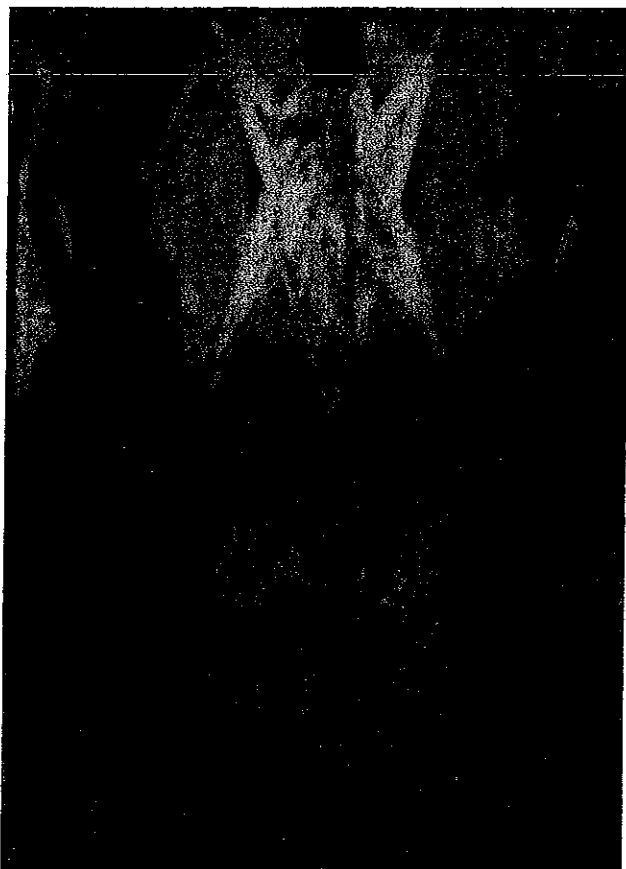




31. Icon with Saint George with Scenes from His Life. The Novgorod school. First half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood. State Tret'akov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.

32. Iconostasis in the church of the Holy Spirit. 1650s. Rogatun, Ukraine.

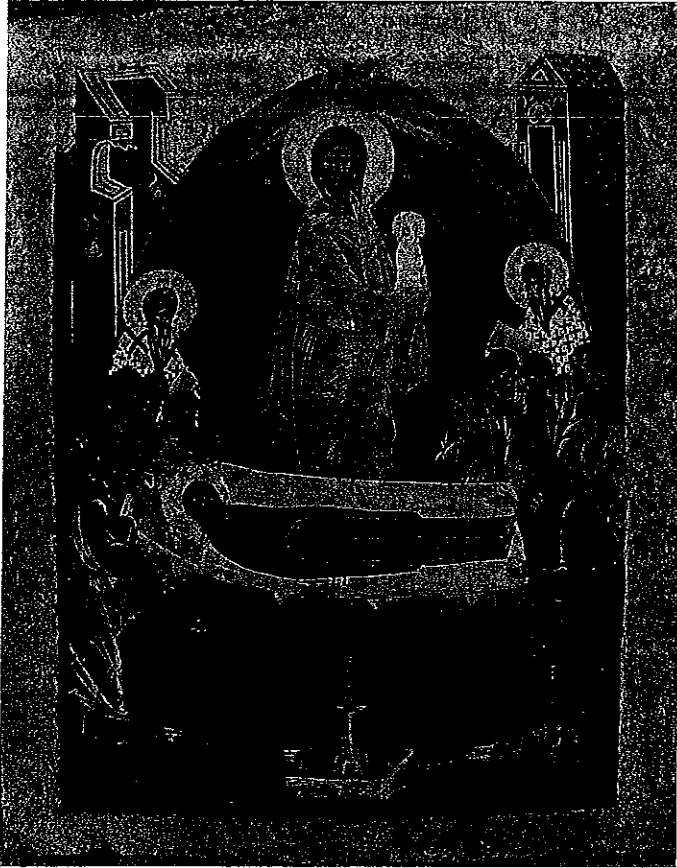




33. Theophanes the Greek. Icon with the Transfiguration. Novgorod, ca. 1403s. Tempera on wood. State Tre'takov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.



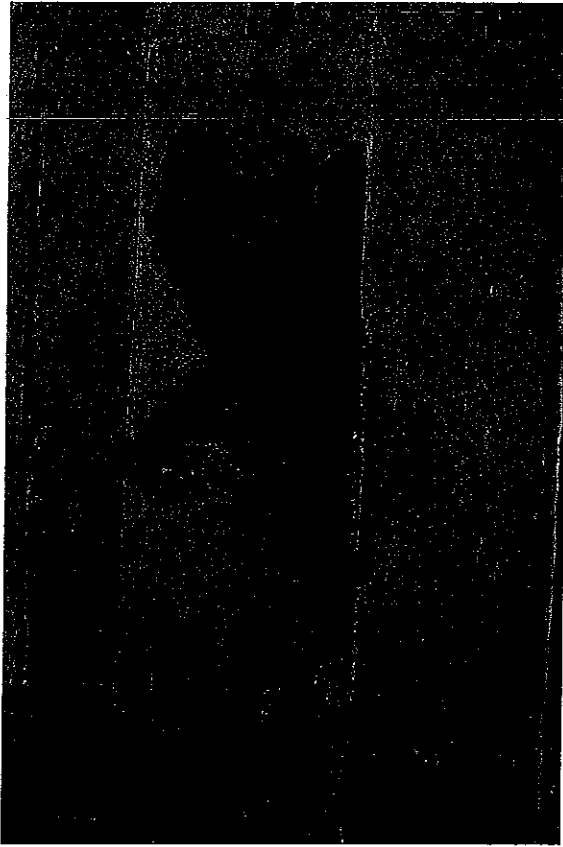
34. Theophanes the Greek. Icon with the Saviour. Moscow, later 14<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood. The Annunciation cathedral in the Moscow's Kreml, Russia.



35. Theophanes the Greek. Icon with the Dormition of the Virgin. Moscow, late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Tempera on wood. State Tret'akov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.



36. Andrei Rublev. The Old Testament Trinity. Ca. 1420. Tempera on wood. State Tret'akov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.

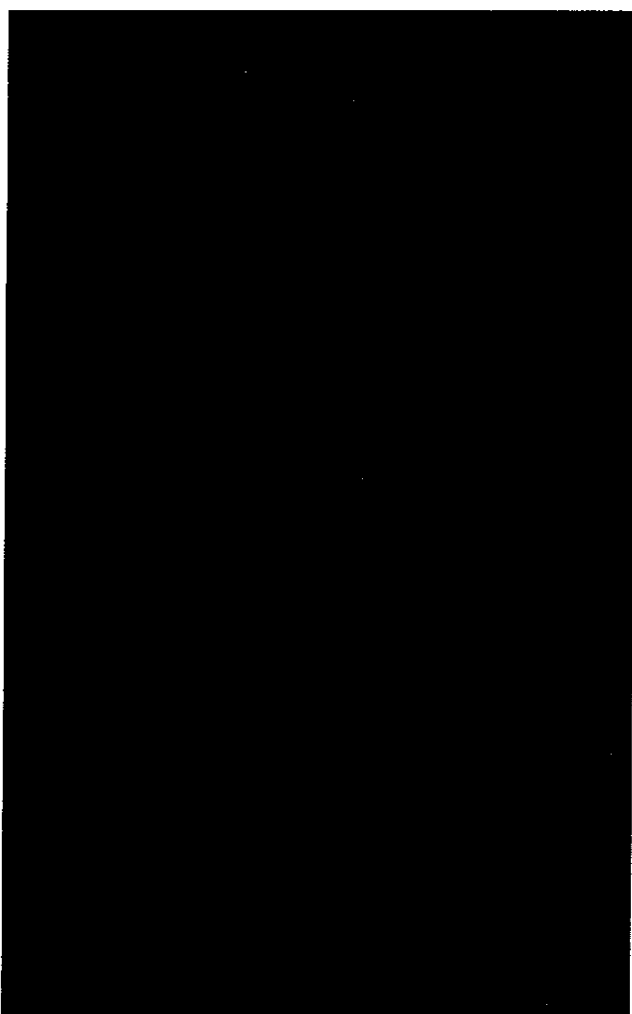
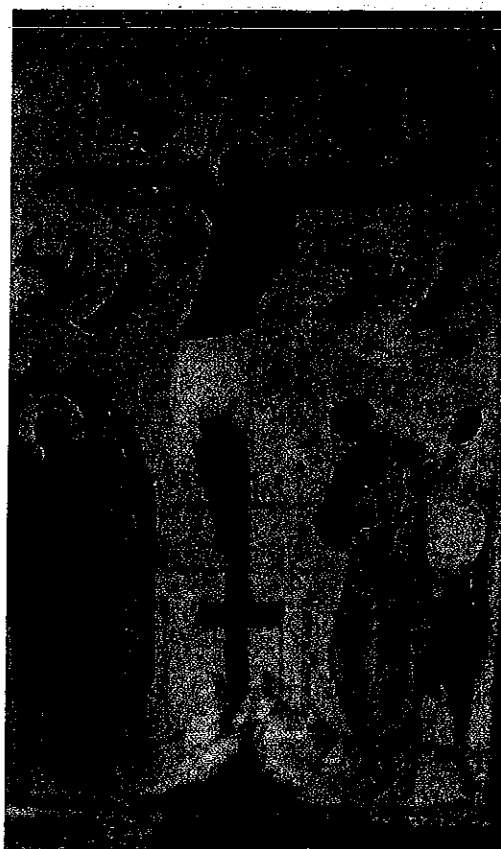


37. Andrei Rublev. Icon with the Saviour. Zvenigorod, ca. 1410s. Tempera on wood. State Tret'akov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.



38. Andrei Rublev. Icon with the Archangel Michael. Zvenigorod, ca. 1410s. Tempera on wood. State Tret'akov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.

39. Dionysius. Icon with the Crucifixion.  
1500. Tempera on wood. State Tret'akov  
Gallery, Moscow, Russia.



40. Symon Ushakov. Icon Virgin of  
Vladimir is the Patron of Moscow. 17<sup>th</sup>  
century. Podlinnik. Archive of Moscow's  
Kreml, Russia.